

THE YOUNG PEOPLE

by

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The 5:23 from New York was late. Zelda lit another cigarette and stretched her neck out the Buick window so she could see the tracks. The train would come as quickly if she sat comfortably back against the seat, and Tony would find the car without her assistance, since it was parked in the same spot every evening. But she could never relax when she was waiting.

She could never relax, period, she thought, and recognized with amusement a certain pride in the idea. No successful suburban matron knew how to relax—or wanted to know, which amounted to the same thing.

Zelda glanced briefly at her watch and then at the empty tracks again. What if something had happened? What if Tony never arrived?

She was deliberately frightening herself, the way she used to do when she was a child, left to sleep alone at night, trying to imagine that her clothes hanging on the chair formed the shape of a man who waited in the dark to kidnap her.

Still, what if she had to go on without Tony? Women managed such things, of course, some of them on purpose. Half the women she knew had been divorced. She had even thought seriously once of divorcing Tony. But now she never would. It was impossible to imagine a life without Tony or, worse still, with somebody else. It had taken her years to acquire a taste for

the meat, for example, and now she didn't like it any other way, yet another man might want his well done. Even the thought of a whole new series of adjustments made her tired.

She had just lit a third cigarette when the train came roaring around the bend as importantly as if it were headed across the continent instead of for northern Westchester. Before it heaved to a stop, men leaped from its steps. Were they trying to prove their agility, Zelda thought, or only rushing to get seats on the bus?

After these, Tony was, as usual, one of the first to get off. He walked briskly, refreshed from his nightly nap in the train, waving at Zelda and grinning. He had had a good day, then. When he hadn't, the lines in his face made him look haggard instead of interesting, and it was a little easier to believe that he had a twenty-year-old son and a daughter seventeen. She thought of her father, paunchy, gray and stooped behind his hardware counter at Tony's age—an oldish man, if not an old one.

"Hello, Babe," he said. "Been waiting long? The train was late."

He bent down and kissed her through the window before she moved to let him into the driver's seat.

"I didn't mind," she lied. "I was thinking."

"What about?"

"Oh, all kinds of things. That I'm glad I married you, for one."

"Ah. A sensible woman, I always did say." He maneuvered out of the snarl of station traffic and headed the car toward home.

"Did you have the oil changed today?"

She laughed, and lit a cigarette for him and one for herself. "You're so romantic, darling," she said contentedly. "Yes, I had the oil changed."

"Looks as if it's going to be a good weekend for a change. Maybe I can get in a round of golf in the morning."

"Tomorrow? Jim's first day home?"

"You don't imagine Jim's going to be hanging around waiting for me to entertain him, do you? As soon as he thinks it's polite, he'll be off to see that girl of his."

"Yes, I know. He only boards with us, really, doesn't he? I always look forward to the summer and think we're going to see such a lot of him. I suppose it wouldn't be natural if we did."

"I'll see plenty of him, once he starts working at the office!"

Zelda mashed out her cigarette. "I wish he'd work somewhere else, even if it's just for the summer."

"Oh? Is this something new?"

"No. I've been thinking about it ever since he first said he wanted a job with you. I don't believe it's a good thing." She could feel herself growing tense in preparation for Tony's opposition. "He doesn't care about advertising, not one little bit."

"You're wrong," Tony said, his voice edged with anger. "He and I had a long talk when I was up for the reunion. He'll get a little training this summer, and take the right course in college next year, and then go in with me permanently. That's what he's looking forward to."

After the away is through with him, she thought. Three years from now—at least. He can change his mind a dozen times before then. Still, she felt she had to pursue the subject, now that she had finally come out with it.

"He wants it because it's safe," she said. "He feels it will give him security, and he'll be able to marry Libby and never worry about the future."

"Well, what's wrong with that?"

She glanced at him impatiently. His heavy, well-shaped brows were drawn together, his large mouth compressed against this thing she was telling him.

"Nothing, if he cared about the work too, or was fitted for it," she persisted. "You could have gone into your father's jewelry business, couldn't you? And been rich twenty years ago, before taxes took everything. But you thought it was more important to do something you really wanted to do."

"Sure—and maybe I was a fool, too. Instead of beating my brains out. . . . Anyhow, I'm not forcing Jim into this, you know, the way my father tried to force me. It's his own choice." He looked at her briefly, coldly. "What do you want me to do—tell

him he can't work for me, because I don't think he'd like it? That he has to find something he's crazy about or be out of a job? Leave the boy alone, Zelda. He's old enough to know what he wants."

Zelda said nothing more. It was useless. Tony, like his father before him, wanted his son in business with him, wanted him to like the work and be good at it. He would never insist on it—not in this day when every informed parent was an amateur psychiatrist—but he was delighted that Jim had decided on it for himself. He would be all the more disappointed when it didn't work out.

Parents were always disappointed, she thought, one way or another. Now that people had learned it was best for children to have more freedom to manage their own lives, the children didn't want it any more. Parents like Tony and herself, who had grown up in the twenties, were equipped to understand the rebellions of their children. Only their children didn't rebel. Somehow, it seemed, the generations always managed to miss each other.

"It will be all right," Tony said. "You worry too much."

She smiled, and leaned comfortably against his shoulder. "I don't. Sometimes I don't worry for whole minutes at a time."

They turned in between the stone pillars that marked the entrance to Underwood Park. It was a little older, a little less spacious than the Haddon Hills section, but the residents always said that it was friendlier. However, most of those who graduated out of the \$25-\$35,000 a-year class moved to Haddon Hills.

Zelda had no wish to move, even in the unlikely event that they ever would be able to afford it. They had lived in their house ten years, and it had been eleven years old when they bought it, but it had been built for permanence and comfort. The walls were thick, the roof was good, the plumbing was copper, and there were no odd little rooms nor meandering hallways. One maid, with another once a week for the heavy cleaning, had always managed to take care of it. A solid red brick house, with no picture windows or concealed radiators, but shaded by old

trees and softened by plantings that seemed to have been there always.

"When we're too feeble to climb the stairs," Zelda had said to Tony once, "we'll have to move to one of those ranch house affairs."

"I should say not," he had answered. "I had enough of that all-on-one-floor business in New York apartments for thirty years. I still get a kick out of going upstairs to bed. When we're feeble, we'll build in an elevator."

She went inside, now, while Tony put the car away, and called in to the kitchen to ask Rena, the maid, whether there were any messages. Rena came out into the hall. She was a light-skinned colored woman of about thirty-five who had been with them not quite eleven months, longer than any maid in recent years. Zelda always said her only virtue was that she stayed. She was not very bright or very clean or a very good cook. But they were all used to her and liked her. More important, she seemed to like them.

"Miss Taylor called," she said.

"Who?" Rena never got a name straight.

"Your sister, Miss Taylor."

"Oh, Mrs. Taynor. What did she say?"

"She's coming Sunday, but you don't have to meet her. She ain't taking the train. Somebody's driving her, and she don't know what time she'll get here, but you should expect her."

Somebody was driving her. Oh, Lord, Zelda thought. Not another man, not already, with her second marriage barely cold in its grave.

"All right," Zelda said. "Anything else?"

"No, Ma'am."

"Is Ann home yet?" She had tried, with three successive maids, to make it "Miss Ann," and finally given it up. Ann didn't care, anyhow. She thought "Miss Ann" sounded like somebody out of "Gone with the Wind."

"She's sleeping," Rena said. "She only wants to be woken up for dinner or if Bill calls."

What is she sleeping for? Zelda wondered, as she went upstairs. I never slept in the middle of the day when I was seventeen, and if I had I'd have left a different message. Don't wake me unless a man calls—any man. Imagine, at seventeen, being limited to Bill, to that half-baked little boy, only seventeen himself. . . .

As she sat down at the dressing-table and creamed her face, she could hear the rattle of ice from the kitchen. Tony had a theory that cocktails ought to stand in the refrigerator for a while to mellow—a theory that, as far as Zelda knew, had been born with him and would die with him. Yet his drinks always turned out very well.

She wiped off her make-up and looked at herself. It was always a shock. Her face *felt* the same as twenty years ago. I don't really mind the lines so much, she thought. You can always believe they give you character. But the little sagging spots, the little flabbiness. . . .

Still, she was an attractive woman, and she could have passed for less than forty. Her figure had scarcely changed, yet she did not have to watch her weight. She was too thin, if anything—always had been. I burn myself up, she thought, but it's a fashionable disability.

The phone rang, and instantly Ann's door opened. There was no further sound until Rena yelled up, "Ann! It's him!" Then the door creaked open wider, and Ann's loafers slapped down the stairs. My dainty little daughter, Zelda thought.

"She's lying flat on her back on the floor," Tony said, when he came up, "with the phone on her chest. Maybe she can't think of sweet nothings sitting up in a chair."

"Sweet nothings? Don't be silly. She's telling him what Miss Ferdinand said to her in history, and how she did on the French exam, and how much math homework she has."

Tony took off his shirt and scratched his stomach absently. Without his clothes, he looked a little thick around the middle, and the hair on his chest was graying. She felt pity because he was aging too, but only for a moment. You did not have to feel

sorry these days for men who were getting older. Look at Pinza.

"You sound mad," Tony said. "What do you care what they talk about?"

"Who?"

He grinned. "That's my Babe. Can't keep her mind on any one thing for more than five minutes. Ann and Bill," he said. "You were objecting because she was probably telling him how much math homework she has."

Zelda dotted her cheeks with cream rouge. "It's such a waste, that's all. Seventeen," she said. "And what is she doing with it? Flopping around in sloppy old loafers and those awful blue jeans that make her stick out in back, talking on the phone every night to the same silly little boy about school. *School!*"

"He's almost six feet tall," Tony said.

Zelda ignored this. "When I was seventeen," she said, "I had half a dozen beaux, and I wouldn't have looked at one under twenty. And I didn't talk to them about history."

"I didn't talk about history either," Tony said, retreating into the bathroom. "As I remember it, I never wasted much time talking at all—not with a girl . . ."

That was how you were likely to think of that period—as a time when all you did was neck (funny how that term had persisted; what was its origin? she wondered—it always made her think of two giraffes with their necks intertwined) and drink terrible liquor out of flasks or coffee cups.

But there was plenty of talk then, too—mostly about sex. You felt very daring when you discussed sex with men. You had always been taught not to discuss it with anybody, not even girls, nobody except your mother, who was certainly the last person to whom you'd mention it. But you talked about other things too—love, which you pretended you didn't believe in, and even poetry. It was all right to like poetry, as long as it was on the cynical side (*cynical*, she thought; you hardly ever hear that word any more) like Ernest Dowson or John Weaver.

And sometimes, in groups, you discussed politics. You decided

that almost everything about the government was wrong and ought to be changed, but you never did anything about it. Except for one or two who joined the Socialist party and voted for Norman Thomas when they became old enough. But those were never really in Zelda's crowd.

Sex had been the big thing, though. They had acted as if they'd discovered it. Yet girls had done everything to make themselves as unwomanly and unsexed as possible, by any standards that had ever existed before or since, and the men found them appealing just the same. We had it, Zelda thought, but I don't know why.

She was the type for her time, small, skinny, flat-bosomed, and when she cut her dark hair in a boyish bob, she looked piquant, thin-faced and big-eyed. She was popular, without yielding more than occasional kisses. Her technique was simple and self-taught. She pretended to be so shaken by the nearness of whatever man was importuning her that she could not trust herself.

"Please," she would say, in a breathless whisper. "Please take me home now, while I can still keep my head . . ."

She felt nothing beyond a small interest when she was kissed, but it would have been as shameful to admit that she was not physically stirred as to admit that she was stirred emotionally.

Everything was simple and pleasant until she met Morgan Riley. Zelda lived with her parents and two younger brothers in a pleasantly commonplace house on a once-fashionable street in Framington, a city of 50,000 in northern New York. Her father owned a large hardware store and made about \$8,000 a year, very little of which he gave to the government. A family of six could live comfortably on that in Framington in the middle twenties. They had no servants and no car, but neither did anyone else on their street. They were middle middle-class, and kept quite strictly and contentedly within their own caste. Except Marcia, the oldest, two years older than Zelda, who had made the whole family miserable until her parents consented to let her go to New York City to study Art.

Zelda met Morgan Riley when she was eighteen. She was at

The Shack, a roadhouse twenty miles outside of town, with Hal Wilson and two other couples, and he was alone. She was dancing with Hal when she noticed him. Hal danced with his cheek against hers, and his skin felt uncomfortably hot. He kept telling her how sweet she was and asking her when she was coming outside in the car with him, and she decided she didn't like him very much and might not go out with him again. She had enough admirers without him. Only of course you never had enough.

"There's a man all by himself," she said, to distract Hal. "Why would anybody come to The Shack all by himself?"

"That's Morgan Riley," Hal said. "He's been living in France or somewhere. My father works for his father."

He sounded romantic, a man who had lived in France. He looked romantic too, so dark and brooding. "I'd like to meet him," Zelda said.

Hal was sulky about it. He didn't want to introduce her to anybody; he wanted to go outside in the car with her. Besides, he didn't really know Morgan Riley. He had only met him once, when he had gone to the office to see his father.

"Please," Zelda said, and pouted. "Pretty please with sugar on it."

Morgan Riley did not seem delighted to meet her. He looked at Hal without recognition, nodded to Zelda and asked, as though he hoped they wouldn't, whether they would sit down.

"Mr. Riley, I've been watching you, and I'm just overcome with curiosity," Zelda said. "Why on earth are you here all alone on a Saturday night, a man as—well—?" She stopped and blinked her eyelashes at him. "I hope you don't think I've got an awful nerve."

He seemed to be making an effort to focus on her. "Not at all," he murmured.

"Then will you tell me?" She leaned across the table toward him, hoping he could smell her perfume, "Vierge Folie."

When he tried to lift his glass of water, it sloshed all over the table. Everyone she knew got hilarious with liquor, or maud-

lin, or passed out. She had never seen anybody just sit quietly drunk and do nothing.

"Not at all mysterious," he said, with slow and exquisite enunciation. "I like to be alone."

Hal took her arm. "Come on," he said. "Can't you take a hint?"

"You go along," Zelda said, smiling at him brightly. "I'll meet you back at the table later."

As soon as he was gone and she was alone with Morgan Riley she was frightened. He was much older than the men she knew, twenty-five, perhaps, and unlike anyone she was used to.

He shook his head at her solemnly. "Not nice. Not at all nice."

"I don't care," she said. "He's too fat, and he has bad breath."

Morgan Riley smiled, and crinkles of flesh hid his glazed eyes. He looked happy and familiar and not drunk any more.

"No worse than mine, I'll bet," he said. "Polished off a pint flask of rye since dinner." He made a stiff little bow. "Care to dance?"

Later he took her home in his car. Or rather she took him home. He insisted that he was in no condition to drive, which was something new for her. Every other man she knew was sure he could drive, even when he was ready to fall on his face. Morgan also insisted upon sitting alone in the rumble seat.

"Don't trust myself," he said. "Liquor makes me amorous. You're too young and pure."

"How do you know?" she asked him indignantly. "You don't know anything about me."

They were standing beside his car, a new Marmon roadster that was plainly yellow even in the dim light of the empty parking lot. He stood so stiffly that Zelda felt he would topple over if she touched him. She was still a little frightened, but she could hear herself telling the girls about it on the telephone tomorrow. . . . "I was at The Shack with that dumb Hal Wilson, and this perfectly marvelous-looking man, like Ronald Colman only more *sombre*, if you know what I mean, was sitting all alone at a

table—imagine, all alone on a Saturday night at The Shack—and he kept staring at me. . . .”

“Mean you aren’t young and pure?” Riley said. “That’s different.”

He scarcely seemed to move, but at once his mouth was so hard on hers that her teeth bit into the inside of her lips. She smelled whisky and bay rum and tobacco. Long afterwards, when she had almost forgotten Morgan Riley, that combination of aromas always excited her.

If it had occurred to her to fight him, she couldn’t; her legs were too rubbery and her arms too heavy. But it didn’t occur to her. Nothing at all occurred to her.

Riley moved away and frowned down at her. “See?” he said. She held on to the door of the car. “See what?”

“Baby,” he said. “Nothing but a baby. Get in.”

He opened the door for her, bowing gravely, and then climbed carefully and with dignity into the rumble seat. Instantly he was asleep. She drove him to his house and, since she could think of nothing else to do with him, left him in the rumble seat and took a taxi home.

She did not sleep all the rest of the night. “Morgan,” she said aloud. “Morgan, I love you.” She imagined him here in the room, kissing her, saying wonderful things to her. She was glad that Marcia had gone to New York, that the bed beside her was empty. It would have been silly to imagine Morgan here, with Marcia in the room.

By the next day, their love affair had made so much progress in her mind that she could not believe it when she did not hear from him. She waited another day, and the following evening she called him.

“Hello,” she said. “This is Zelda.”

“Who?”

It was a bad connection, she thought. “Zelda,” she said. “Zelda Lisbon.”

There was a small pause. “Zelda! How wonderful to hear from you. It’s been years, hasn’t it?”

"Oh, years," she said. "Ever since Saturday night." She was so angry she was afraid she was going to cry. "I hope you slept well in the rumble seat."

She hung up, and then stared at the phone appalled, because maybe now it was all over, the shortest love affair on record, and she had done it herself, in a foolish burst of temper. He couldn't help it, could he, if he had had too much to drink that night and was a little hazy about what had happened?

She had reached for the telephone, when it rang.

"You didn't really think I'd forgotten, did you," he said. "Can't you take a joke, Stella?"

"Zelda."

He laughed. "All right, you win. But I remember you were pretty and you drove me home and I kissed you."

A week ago she would have known that a man could say all this without remembering anything. She knew it now. But she told herself that he had not forgotten their kiss, that he could not forget it, any more than she could.

"When am I going to see you?" he asked.

Long after the whole thing was over, she would think about it and wonder what had happened to her. She met Morgan Riley once or twice when she went home to visit, and she could see nothing in him at all. It frightened her to think that she would have married him if he'd have had her.

She would have married him. Or anything else he wanted, if she could have convinced herself that he loved her. She tried, even though he told her almost every time they were together that he did not, but she never quite managed it.

Her best friend, Kathy, did not see what difference it made. Kathy was blonde and voluptuous, no matter how tightly she hooked her brassiere.

"Whatever it is you feel for each other, it's something natural and powerful, and you're foolish to deny it," she said. "If you do, you'll always be frustrated."

Zelda accepted this. There had never been a generation that so earnestly intellectualized love-making. But secretly, so secretly

that she scarcely knew it herself, she was a romantic, and she did not believe that when Browning wrote "Three Days," he was only looking forward to getting Elizabeth into the back seat of his brougham, or that there was nothing more between Heloise and Abelard than a biological accident. She talked and acted the way everybody else did, but she was waiting for something more glorious—a grand passion for which she would give up everything.

She knew she had not found it with Morgan Riley, but she wanted to believe she had. She told herself that his indifference was only his way of fighting the threatened loss of his freedom.

Actually, his freedom could not have been less in danger. He broke dates with her whenever it suited him, and seldom telephoned when he said he would. She always called him, if she had not heard from him for a day or two. •

"You run after him too much," Kathy told her. "You throw yourself at him. No man likes that."

"You don't understand," Zelda said. "I can't play games with Morgan, or use a lot of sally feminine wiles on him. This is too big for that. There can't be anything but honesty between us."

The fact was she could not wait to see if he would call her; she could not wait to be with him. Away from him, it bothered her that they went through only the briefest formalities of speech before they began making love, and that they really knew nothing about each other at all. But when they were together, she was more impatient than he was, partly because the only time he ever said anything sweet to her was when she was in his arms.

"What are you holding out for, anyhow?" he asked her once, when she had pushed him away in the car. "I'm not going to marry you, if it's that. Some day, in about five years, I'll pick me a wife who's rich and beautiful, and I won't give a hoot if she's a virgin." He offered her his flask. "Who cares?"

Zelda gulped a little of the whisky, and shuddered. She did not see how anyone could like it, or enjoy the sickish dizziness that went with it, but people thought you were a wet-blanket unless you drank.

"If you loved me," she said, "I wouldn't care about anything."

She could never understand later why he refused to say he loved her, or to make any pretense of it. Perhaps it was a matter of pride with him. Perhaps he had more honesty than she suspected.

During the three months she knew him, she went out listlessly with other men so that her parents would not begin asking questions. In the end they came home from the movies and found her necking with Morgan in the living room. Since they were no earlier than Zelda expected them, she thought afterward that perhaps subconsciously she had wanted to be discovered.

Her mother came up when she was in bed and talked with her in the dark. She was a large woman, bigger than her husband, with a broad, plain face which only recently she had taken to improving with a little powder and a light shade of lipstick. Zelda, watching her struggle to find the proper words, felt a rush of love and pity for her. Poor Mother, she thought. She doesn't understand anything about me at all.

"I've always heard what goes on with young people today," Mrs. Lisbon said, "but I didn't think my girls—I always taught you to be good, and that a man wouldn't respect you if you let him—and I thought I could trust you . . ."

"I haven't done anything," Zelda said softly. She lay back on her pillow and wondered why she felt nothing except a vague relief. "I mean, I haven't *done* anything."

Her mother's hand went to her chest in an awkward, familiar gesture. "Well, I should hope not," she said. "How can you even—? It's bad enough that you—" She stopped and gathered her words again. "I never liked that Riley boy I told your father I thought he drank, but your father said you wouldn't go out with him if he did."

Oh, God, Zelda thought, they're so innocent, so trusting. She rolled over on her stomach and began to cry. Her mother kissed her and pushed the damp hair from her face. "What's the matter, baby? Do you love him?"

"I don't know," Zelda sobbed. "Everything's so—so awful."

Her mother went on stroking her hair. After a time, she said, "You could go and stay with Marcia in New York for a while. Would you like that?"

Tony had gone off to play golf, and Zelda was alone on the terrace with the Sunday paper. The sun was hot, but it was a little blowy for June and she had trouble keeping the pages from fluttering.

There was so much to wade through on Sunday, and she sometimes decided to let it go, but she never did. She felt guilty if she omitted anything but the financial section and the classified ads, though she could not imagine why. If she had had any free will about it, which she apparently did not, she would have read the magazine and book sections, looked at the store ads, and thrown the rest away, catching up with the news on Monday when it would not be such a chore to find it.

She was carefully reading the obituaries, wondering why the list was always longer on Sunday than any other day—did more people regularly die on Saturday?—when Ann came out. She was in pajamas and a seersucker robe and her hair was up in curlers. Without make-up, her face looked childish and rather plain, and Zelda could see a resemblance to her mother which completely disappeared under powder and lipstick. There was a long crease, an imprint from the pillow, down one of Ann's cheeks.

"Hi," she said. "Bill call?"

Zelda shook her head. "Ann, you shouldn't come out here in your pajamas. People will see you."

"So what? I'm a lot more dressed than in a bathing suit." She kissed Zelda affectionately. "Mm-mmm, you've got such nice soft skin. Bill's is getting all bristly."

"That's an odd comparison," Zelda said.

It never occurs to her that I might not like her to know how Bill's skin feels against hers, she thought. We all take it for granted that she does know, and that it's all right.

Once Zelda had objected because Ann and Bill always parked in the driveway in Bill's father's car after he brought her home from a date, and giggled and talked at the tops of their voices.

"It isn't fair to disturb people at that hour of the night," Zelda had said.

Ann had looked at her with her peculiarly limpid gaze. She had amber-colored eyes, like no one else in Zelda's family or Tony's—a charming mutation, Zelda thought.

"You wouldn't want us to park on a public road, would you?" Ann had asked her. "Wouldn't you rather I necked in my own driveway?"

"Well—" Zelda had responded weakly, "assuming it's necessary to neck at all—"

"Oh, mother! As long a time as Bill and I have been going steady, you wouldn't expect me not to kiss him goodnight, would you?"

Zelda had not dared to ask her whether that was all she meant by necking. She had not wanted to put any ideas into her head. Besides, she had had a feeling that Ann would turn those clear eyes on her and ask, "Well, for goodness sake, what else?" much as Zelda's mother had said, "Well, I should hope not," when Zelda told her she hadn't *done* anything with Morgan Riley.

"I'm starved," Ann said now, falling into a canvas chair and stretching bare, sun-tanned legs across the flagstones. Her feet were bare, too, Zelda noticed, and her toenails, which she had not yet started painting for the summer, were not altogether clean. "But I've got to wait for Bill. He's coming for breakfast."

"Wouldn't it be simpler if he lived here?"

Ann giggled. "Not till we're married."

"Oh? And when are you publishing the banns?"

Ann grinned and stretched her arms high over her head. The summer freckles were coming out on her nose and she looked solid and little-girlish, yet on the rare occasions when she dressed up she was miraculously transformed, and Bill might have been her younger brother.

"Probably never," she said lazily. "We're too young to know now what kind of people we want to marry."

"How are you going to find out, if you never date anybody else?"

"We'll be dating other kids next year, when we're both in college—maybe even before that, if we get sick of each other. We'll find out then."

"So you think you may get sick of each other?"

Ann shrugged. "I don't know. How can you tell? We've been going steady almost two years—that's longer than most kids do." For an instant her clear eyes clouded. "Anyhow, I hope if it happens we'll both want to break it off—at the same time, I mean."

"That's an old feminine hope," Zelda said, "but it doesn't often come true." She tried again, knowing it was useless, "That's why you ought to go out with other boys, so if anything happens between you and Bill you won't be stranded."

"I can't, mother," Ann said patiently. "Not while Bill and I are going steady. You know that."

"Then why don't you stop going steady?" Zelda persisted. "As long as you're going to stop in a few months anyhow, when you go to college, wouldn't this be a good time to—?"

"Oh, mother, *now*?" Ann broke in, as though speaking to a child. "With the whole summer ahead, and the beach parties and the club dances and everything? There couldn't be a worse time."

"You'd get to go," Zelda said. "Other boys would ask you, maybe more attractive boys than Bill—older—"

Ann shook her head. "I'd never be sure. I know how it is for the girls who don't go steady. They sit around before a party waiting for the phone to ring, and then if nobody asks them they pretend they had something better to do, but everybody knows anyhow." At that moment, as if to point up her argument, the phone rang and she scrambled to her bare and slightly soiled feet and ran into the house, yelling, "I've got it!" to no one in particular.

Zelda picked up the paper and went on with the obituaries,

but none of the names registered in her mind. She was thinking about Ann, the daughter with whom she had once hoped to share such a deep understanding and sympathy, unlike anything that had ever been possible for a mother and daughter before. After all, there had never been a generation of mothers whose youth had been so rebellious and gay and unforgettable, or whose middle age was so youthful.

But Ann persisted in smiling and eluding her. In some ways, she was sensible and conventional to such a degree that she seemed to belong in her grandmother's generation, yet her manner of dress, her casual frankness about sex—a frankness that was genuine, not affected like that of the twenties—her weird dating customs were exclusively middle twentieth century.

She was childish, yet, it seemed to Zelda, pitifully old and circumscribed, missing out on all the excitement of hearing the phone ring and not knowing what masculine voice might be at the other end. . . . What if occasionally she had to pay for it by not having a date at all? That was part of being young, and though Zelda would not have wanted to go back and go through it again—heaven forbid!—she would not have wanted to miss it for anything.

But Ann wanted to miss it. In her desperate clinging to Bill, she was like Jim, going into the advertising business with Tony, though he had no interest in it and no aptitude for it. They sought security as Zelda's generation had sought escape from the established patterns, and to Zelda it seemed sad. Perhaps it was because there were no established patterns any more from which to escape, unless one wanted to go completely overboard and hold up gas stations, or court death with wild games on the highway in hot-rod cars, or take dope.

Tony, alarmed at the stories in the newspapers, had once warned Jim about accepting cigarettes from strangers. He had scarcely begun when Jim had interrupted him, looking at him with the faintly pitying smile that never failed to irritate Tony.

"You mean refusers?" he had said. "What do you think I am, dad, a j.d.?"

"What, may I ask, is a j.d.?"

"Juvenile delinquent. There aren't any in Underwood Park, as far as I know, unless you want to count Frank Cameron."

Jim had sounded hopeful, as though he would have liked Tony to count Frank Cameron. But Tony and Zelda were all for Frank, who had been born to his parents so late in life that they were more like his grandparents. They had dressed him in short pants until he was almost twelve, and though Zelda sympathized and agreed with their dislike of the custom of long pants for little boys—it made them look like midgets, she thought—you could do nothing much worse to a child than keep him from conforming to the clothing styles of his contemporaries.

But Frank's parents had done worse. They had not allowed him to play rough games or ride in cars unless an adult was driving or have dates with girls. At sixteen, when he was legally old enough to leave school, he ran away, hitch-hiked to California and got a job in a restaurant, and as soon as he was seventeen, he joined the Marines. He was no juvenile delinquent. He was a rebel, and anyone who had been young in the twenties understood a rebel.

Zelda looked up from her paper and kicked a loose piece of flagstone with the toe of her red play-shoe. Patsy, the once-a-week gardener, had laid the terrace outside the dining room six years ago. Everybody in the family loved it out here in warm weather, for lounging or for a dinner of steak, cooked over charcoal on the portable grill. It was cool if you sat under the thick foliage of the dogwood, with warm spots where the sun came through.

The flagstones, though, had not been properly laid and they kept chipping off. Patsy insisted it was because the ground heaved. When Zelda had once suggested it was poor workmanship, his face had turned an alarming purple and he had gabbled at her so fast and violently, in Italian that though she had no idea what he was saying, she had been afraid ever to cross him again. He was not much of a gardener, either, continually pulling up seedlings and claiming they were weeds. Tony always said he did it deliberately, because he hated growing things. But there

was no use changing. They were used to Patsy, and another gardener would have had other shortcomings. It would be only a matter of changing faces.

Nobody gave really good service any more. The old-fashioned workman, the servant of twenty years ago, who took pride in his work, tried honestly to earn his pay and was respectful to his employers, had all but disappeared. Theoretically, Zelda had always favored more advantages for the laboring class. It infuriated her when her father said it was all Roosevelt's fault for the way he had "given Labor its head"; people must have talked that way about Lincoln, she thought, when they had to pay their workers instead of buying them outright. But it was an awful nuisance when nothing was ever done properly and the people who worked for you treated you in such a high-handed, take-it-or-leave-it manner.

Oh well, Jim could probably fix the broken flagstone; he could fix anything, do anything with his hands. When he was eleven he had built a tool house next to the garage, and they had used it ever since, and at sixteen he had found an old jalopy in a junk yard and fixed it up so it was running still better, she sometimes thought, than their new, eight cylinder, automatic shift job.

"You ought to be an engineer," Zelda had said to him once, while he was still in high school.

He had just shrugged. "It's too tough—too much math."

"What if it is tough? Nothing worth while comes easy."

"I'll find something that does," he had said, and grinned.

He exasperated her beyond endurance sometimes, for she felt that he was capable of so much, yet he seemed to care about nothing very deeply, to have no lasting interests. He had slid through high school with a minimum of study and made Dartmouth only because his father was an alumnus. Zelda was sure he could have been a superior student, but he would not bother. He derided Ann, who worked hard and stood near the top of her class.

"Think you'll remember any of that glup? A year from now



you won't know the difference between osmosis and fried chicken, and nobody'll care."

"I'll remember it until the Regents," Ann said.

It was not pure intellectual curiosity that motivated Ann. There was considerable competition in her school for high grades, and it was a mark of prestige to be known as a "brain," as long as you were otherwise normal and not "book happy."

In her day, Zelda thought, school marks and school itself had seemed highly unimportant. Anyone who took it seriously, or who would not cut classes when there was something better to do, was considered the equivalent of a drip. But they had been moved not by an indifference to knowledge, like Jim, but by a superior scorn of formal education. They had believed you could learn much more by reading on your own, by thinking for yourself, by discussion among your contemporaries. Jim, as far as Zelda knew, rarely opened a book, and Ann's reading was all from the mimeographed list prescribed in school.

A horn blew several times from the driveway, and Zelda jumped to her feet, letting the heavy pile of newspapers slide to the ground. Marcia, she thought. But it can't be, not already, not at 11:30 in the morning. She never gets up until noon.

Yet she was sure it was Marcia, and as she ran around to the other side of the house she felt the mixture of anticipation and misgiving that she always did when she was about to see her sister after a long time. It had been six years since Marcia's second wedding. You never knew what to expect with Marcia.

The first thing she saw was the car, a robin's egg blue convertible, that seemed to stretch the length of the driveway. There was a man at the wheel, but before she could take him in at all, Marcia yelled, "Zell! Look at you, Zell, you're skinnier than ever!" and tore open the door and came hurtling across the lawn with her arms out.

She was still attractive, Zelda thought. She was too fat and her hair was too black and she had deep circles under her eyes, but she was still a woman that men would turn around and look at. She had a vitality, an evident zest for life, that you seldom

saw in anybody any more. Her magnificent eyes sparkled like a girl's, and her voice ranged all over the scale when she talked and she had a way of drawing her breath in between her teeth as though she saw or tasted something delectable.

"Oh, Marce, it's good to see you!" Zelda said, hugging her. "I'd almost forgotten."

Marcia held Zelda off at arm's length. "Are you all right, Zel? Are you happy?"

Zelda laughed. Marcia was here to recover from the break-up of a harrowing marriage—"to forget it all," as Zelda had written when she asked her to come, "in this hectic household of ours, where no one has time to think of anything"—but it was like her to be immediately concerned about her sister instead.

"I'm fine," Zelda said. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"Well!" Marcia kissed her again. "Come see who I brought along."

She pulled Zelda's hand and ran with her across the lawn, and though she was two years older than Zelda and twenty pounds heavier she was not without grace. "Basketball, Zelda thought. She was the star forward on the school team, and it still shows.

Who was this man, Zelda wondered, who had driven her from Reno and now sat patiently waiting in the car, his head bent over a newspaper? There was something familiar about his back in the Brooks sport jacket.

"Aren't you going to say hello to Zel?" Marcia called, while they were still twenty yards away from him.

He folded the paper and turned around. "I wanted to give you two a chance to cry over each other." He got out of the car and stood smiling, waiting for them to come nearer. "How are you, Zelda?"

"Lex!"

Marcia squeezed her arm. "I found him in Reno—can you bear it? He got his divorce two days before I got mine, and when he heard where I was going he insisted on waiting and driving me East. He's in line for some big job in Washington. I didn't pay much attention, but it sounds impressive."

Zelda looked at the big, blond man leaning against the car like a *New Yorker* ad for men's wear or liquor or the latest model convertible. "Are you staying in town, Lex?"

He smiled. He was so damn charming, Zelda thought, always had been. She told herself that she disliked charming men, but she knew it was untrue.

"Marcia thought you might put me up here for a night or two," he said.

Oh, she did, did she? Zelda tried to catch her sister's eye, but Marcia was looking blandly across the lawn. What was she up to with Lex? Didn't she have any sense of the fitness of things? But of course she didn't and never had.

"I'd like to, Lex, really, but my maid would walk right out. She grumbles for days if I have one unexpected guest for dinner. She'd never stand for my suddenly foisting another house guest on her. That's how they are these days."

Lex came away from the car, settling his shoulders into his jacket and looking toward the house. "I'll fix it; I'll talk to her. Where is she? In the kitchen?"

"She doesn't come in on Sundays."

This brought Marcia back to them. "Oh, that's all right then," she said gaily. "Lex can stay tonight, and if your girl objects to him he can leave tomorrow."

"Oh, Marcia, for heaven's sake!" Zelda said. "You know Lex can't stay here. What would everybody think? The kids and everybody? You and your first husband, both guests in my house, after—after everything."

"I never thought you'd get stodgy, Zel," Marcia said.

Zelda seldom lost her temper, but she lost it now. "Stodgy! What's stodgy got to do with it? The last time you and Lex stayed here, when you were married to each other, you fought so that everybody in Underwood Park heard you and knew all about everything that was wrong between you, and now, after another marriage and divorce apiece, you want to stay here in the same house again. How much embarrassment do you think I can—?"

"Zelda's right, Marcia," Lex broke in quietly. "We didn't think."

Marcia shook her head. "I'm sorry." Neither of them looked at Zelda. "I went off half-cocked as usual."

I'm weak, Zelda thought. I'm a weak sister. All anybody has to do is act ashamed or sorry or unhappy and I'm ready to abandon whatever stand I've taken. That's what's wrong with me, with my life, my relationship with Tony . . .

"Bring the bags," she said to Lex. "You can sleep on the studio couch in the study. It has a good innerspring mattress."

Now I'm even trying to sell it to him, she thought. But he didn't have to be sold. Marcia hugged her and Lex thanked her and they made no pretense of continuing their penitent understanding. They know me. They knew just how to handle me, she thought. They played me for a sucker.

Tony drove up as Lex was taking the bags out of the trunk. He had a fresh sunburn that would turn deep tan in a few hours. It seemed to Zelda that he looked much younger than Lex, who was two years his junior and a great deal handsomer, but who had something in his face that Zelda thought of as "used up."

Tony hoisted his golf bag to his shoulder, squinting at the car and at the man bent over the trunk, and then whooped. "Lex! Lex, you old son of a gun! Where did you drop from?" He grabbed him by the shoulders and they stood grinning at each other.

He was acting like an idiotic back-slapper, Zelda thought. Like a Shriner or something. Ordinarily he never oozed over people or got sentimental about auld lang syne. The first college reunion he had ever attended was this year's, his twenty-fifth, and that had been only because Jim was there.

But she remembered he was always this way about Lex. They had been boys together in New York on Seventh Avenue, in what was now Harlem, before Tony's father had made money and the family moved to Park Avenue. That was the one time of his life about which Tony got nostalgic. Seventh Avenue had been like a small town, and he remembered all the boys who had lived there

and the games they had played in the street, one-a-cat and potsy and marbles.

He and Lex had kept up with each other after Tony moved, and the year after Tony entered Dartmouth, Lex had won a scholarship and gone too. They had both been so delighted at the idea of marrying sisters, Zelda thought, but it hadn't lasted long, not, anyway, as against the lifetime it mentioned in the marriage ceremony. Fourteen years. But it was hard to think of Marcia married to one man for even fourteen years.

"How long are you staying?" Tony was asking Lex. "If I'd known you were coming, I'd have tried to fix it so I could take my vacation while you were here. I can't, now—too many of my men are away.

"I have to be in Washington Wednesday—I'll tell you about that later—and then I thought I'd come back to New York and take in a few shows" Lex laughed. "I sound like a hick, don't I? But I haven't been in New York in almost three years. Think of it!"

Zelda went ahead into the house with Marcia. "How are the kids?" Marcia asked. "I'm dying to see them."

"They're fine," Zelda said absently. "Jim's out somewhere with his girl and Ann's around—she's having a friend for breakfast; you'll see them later."

In the guest room, Marcia promptly collapsed on the bed, her silk suit (which had cost \$150 if it had cost a penny, Zelda thought) heedlessly creased under her and wrinkling up above her knees. They were not fat knees. She had the legs of a young woman, shapely and firm.

"Ye gods, I'm tired!" she said. "Lex routed me out at eight o'clock this morning, and I hardly slept a wink last night. We stayed at one of those awful motels, with cars coming and going all—"

"Marcia. You didn't stay at a motel with Lex?"

Marcia laughed. "Don't be such a mother hen, Zeb. Are you worried about my honor? I'm forty-five years old and so is Lex. Do you think anybody cares?" She yawned and closed her eyes.

"But I didn't sleep with him, if that's what's on your mind. We didn't even have adjoining cabins; the place was too filled up."

Zelda looked down at her sister. She appeared much older when you couldn't see the eyes that gave her whole face animation. Forty-five years old, fifteen pounds too heavy, but still with a map in tow, still talking about sleeping with him, even if it was only to say she hadn't. She never came out of the twenties, Zelda thought. That was her time.

"I don't understand what you want with him, Marce, why you brought him here. You were so glad to get rid of him, after all those years of hell. Why do you want to get mixed up with him again?"

Anyone else wouldn't want any man—for a long time, anyhow. Not after fourteen years of battling with Lex and then five more with an alcoholic who had no desire to be cured.

"I've always been crazy about Lex," Marcia said, with her eyes still closed. "It wasn't his fault that we couldn't get along; it wasn't anybody's. There was just some kind of chemistry between us that set us off—and that made us fall for each other, too. He's sweet, Zel." She smiled gently. "He asked me on the way up if I'd marry him again. He says he's never given a hang for anybody else, and he knows now, after that bach he was married to, what he lost when he lost me. He was going to look me up when he got back from Reno, and he thinks it's Fate that we found each other there."

Zelda sat down on the edge of the bed. "You sound like Ann—or the way I'd expect Ann to sound, though she never does; she's far too sensible. Marce," she said, taking her sister's fine-boned hand, "you wouldn't be such a fool, would you, as to go back to Lex?"

"No. But he is sweet when you aren't living with him." She yawned again and opened her eyes. "Let me take a nap for an hour, okay? Then I'll come down and see the kids and we'll talk." She squeezed Zelda's fingers. "It's good to be here—it was swell of you to ask me."

Zelda stood up. "Don't you want to take off your suit?"

"To hell with it, I'm too tired." She kicked off her shoes and rolled over. "I don't have to worry about the suit. Poor Willie Tayner's paying for all I can buy. It's no good to him, anyhow—the money, I mean—except for liquor. The less he has, the less he'll be able to drink, the poor guy. . . ."

She was almost asleep as she said the last words. Zelda covered her with an afghan and went out quietly. It was wonderful, the way Marcia could sleep, as quickly and easily as she had as a child. She herself either lay awake for hours or woke in the middle of the night and could not get back to sleep. Half the time she had to take something, or she would have been too fagged out to do anything the next day, and a nap was impossible. No matter how tired she was, she could not sleep in the daytime.

The importance of her problems seemed to have nothing to do with it at all. During the first precarious years after Tony had started his own agency, the time when Ann had been desperately sick with scarlet fever, when it had looked as though Jim might be yanked out of school and sent to Korea, and when she had thought she might have to leave Tony, she had always been sure, each time, that if it came out all right she would never worry about anything again. But of course she did. The nights could be just as endless when you were worrying about how to propose a change in the school budget at the next open meeting, or what to serve at a dinner party when one of the key guests had ulcers. When you didn't have big troubles, you made the little ones do.

Tony and Lex were out on the terrace with tall glasses. It was better to leave them alone and let them get all their reminiscences and their man-talk out of their systems. She went into the kitchen to see what she was going to feed them all. Sunday, especially in the summer, was a haphazard kind of day, with everyone eating at different hours, and she seldom planned a regular dinner. But there was usually a baked ham, or something precooked in the freezer.

Everything was so much simpler than when she had started

keeping house. Most women could not find enough to keep them busy around the home any more, and now it was beginning to seem as though that was a bad thing for them, and that they and their children had been happier and better off in the old days when mothers were always there, baking cookies that had not come from a ready-mix package, when the kids came home from school.

But you could not stop mechanical or scientific progress, plough it under like potatoes, so that people would be happier. You had to teach them how to be happy with the progress, how to handle it and keep up with it. There ought to be social scientists, the thought, working hand in hand with the atomic boys, working out methods for preparing us to adjust to a new age.

Ann and Bill were sitting at the kitchen table, their egg-en-crusting plates pushed aside, their elbows resting on toast crumbs. Ann had changed into a checked shirt and jeans which almost matched Bill's Hawaiian print shirt and dungarees. She had a kerchief around her head, through which the outlines of her curls stuck knobbily, and most of her lipstick had come off with her breakfast. Bill needed a shave. They looked, Zelda thought, like a couple that had been married a long time and no longer bothered to keep up appearances for each other. It would not have surprised her if they had been talking about the high cost of life.

"We were outlandish enough in the twenties, heaven knows, but at least we *thought* we were glamorous—at least we *tried* . . ."

"Hello, you two," she said. "Why don't you go out and get some of this fine June weather?"

Ann looked amused. "We will, after a while." To Bill she said, "My mother has a mania for fresh air and sunshine, you know."

"Yeah?" Bill got belatedly to his feet, a gangly blond boy with a big-boned, unfinished-looking face. "Hi, Mrs. Halliday."

"I suppose Ann's right. I suppose it is a mania," Zelda said, leaning against the wall, trying to talk easily to this unresponsive, unsmiling boy with whom she had been acquainted for so long

and did not know at all. "When Jim and Ann were babies, everybody had the idea that no child would grow up healthy if it was deprived of a minimum of sunlight. We lived in the city then; you know, and on winter Thursdays when the maid was off I used to wheel the carriage grimly up and down Central Park for hours. I'd have frozen to death rather than go indoors one minute before the sun went down."

She supposed that every generation had its health mania. Her mother's had been on the subject of intestinal regularity. Even when she was away from home, up until the time she went to New York to stay with Marcia, Zelda had been expected to reassure her mother on this matter by mail. The threat of a mysterious, often fatal malady known as auto-intoxication had hung over her childhood, together with the sickly-sweet taste of a patent medicine called Syrup of Figs.

"Today," she said to Bill, "everybody's vitamin-crazy."

He laughed politely, but she knew he was not amused. She thought she had told the anecdote rather well, but Bill stood there wishing she would go, exactly as she had wished that the mothers of her friends would go. Though she felt so close to her own youth, she was no nearer a rapport with him than she had been with them.

"Sit down, Bill," she said. "I have to see what's on hand for dinner." She opened the refrigerator and peered inside at the heavily-laden chromium shelves. There was half a turkey left from the night before; it would be enough, with some tongue and potato salad from the delicatessen, and, for dessert, sponge layers filled with frozen strawberries and whipped cream. "Did you know Aunt Marcia has come, Ann? She's taking a nap."

"I know. I saw Lex. What's he doing here, anyhow?"

Zelda slammed the refrigerator door. "I'm not sure," she said.

As she went out into the dining room she heard Bill say, "That's a square name, Lex. I never heard it."

"It's for Alexis," Ann explained. "Alexis Whitton. He's my aunt's first husband."

Jim's jalopy roared into the driveway, and a minute later Zelda

heard his voice on the terrace. Then he came in to mix himself a Tom Collins. He would drink one, maybe, if he stayed around long enough, two. During the beginning of his sophomore year in college he had done some early steady drinking and then given it up because he said there didn't seem to be much point in it.

"Hi, mom!" He put one arm around her and squeezed her, grinning at her as though she were a girl. He looked as if he had been swimming; his dark curly hair was wet and his face was sunburned. He was full of vitality and good spirits and maleness, and it occurred to Zelda that in many ways he was a masculine counterpart of Marcia, but with none of her adventurous spirit. Half the time he exasperated her almost unendurably, and the other half, as now, she loved him almost unendurably.

"You smell like the Sound," she said, sniffing at his cheek and then pushing him away. "Fishy. How can you go in this early? It must have been freezing."

"It was. I just took a dip, but it's never too cold for Libby. She'd be in yet if I hadn't dragged her out." He took a bottle of gin from the bar. "Make one for you?"

"Okay."

He measured the liquor carefully into two glasses. "I didn't know Lex was coming."

"Neither did I. Aunt Marcia bumped into him in Reno and he drove her here. He's only staying overnight."

"Isn't that sort of a—?" He stopped while he went into the kitchen for ice cubes and then came back and dropped them into the glasses, along with the gin and the Tom Collins mix. He spoke again while he was stirring vigorously, above the sound of the cubes rattling against the glass. "It's funny they'd want to stay here together, isn't it? I wouldn't think you'd like it much."

She said, "I don't," and felt very close to him because he, alone of all of them, seemed to perceive the situation as she did. "But I couldn't refuse to have him. After all, he's a good friend, aside from having been married to Aunt Marcia. Jim," she said impul-

sively, feeling that this was the right moment, the moment when they must understand each other. "you don't really want to go into advertising, do you? It's the work, I mean?"

He handed her her drink and stood holding his, swishing the ice around. "Sure," he said. "Why not?"

"The point isn't so much 'why not?'" She sat down on one of the Hepplewhite dining room chairs. It was important not to let herself become annoyed or angry, to talk objectively to him, as though he were not his mother. She looked up at him and smiled. "The point is 'why?' Jim. It isn't your field at all. You've always been mechanically minded, good with your hands. The way you designed and built the tool house when you were only a little boy, and practically made your own car and everything. How are you going to use that talent in the advertising business?"

He gave her the superior smile, but there was no rancor behind it. There was no rancor in him. Maybe it would have been better if there had been, if he could have got worked up about something, almost anything.

"What do you want me to do, mom?" he asked her. "Work in a garage?"

"At least you'd be fitted for it." Her voice had risen and her heart was beating too fast. She waited a minute. "No. We didn't send you to college to work in a garage. There are all kinds of opportunities for a boy with your ability—it's a mechanical age. You could still go into some kind of engineering, switch your courses next year—" She was floundering now, aware that she was not really clear on this. She had had a vision of him in hip boots and a battered hat, shouting orders to men on a half-finished bridge. . . . or sitting at a large desk in a streamlined office with an awesomely intricate blueprint rolled out before him—*Mr. James Halliday, distinguished industrial designer*. She said, "It's not too late."

"Sure it is, mom. I couldn't get all that math and stuff in a year. Anyhow, I wouldn't want to. Why knock myself out? Dad wants me in with him, and it's okay with me."

She looked up at him. "But do you really think you'll like it?"

"Not too much, I guess," he said. "I don't want to be a doctor and then sit down across the table from her. The way I look at it, any job gets to be just a job after a while. You don't like it, you just do it. At least if I'm with dad I won't have to worry, or wait a million years to get something out of it."

"What do you want out of it?" she asked carefully. "I have no right to be angry, she thought. It's his life."

"What does anybody want? Money," he said, "so I can have a house of my own, like this, and nothing to worry about. I'd like to make long before I'm as old as dad, though, and maybe travel around, or just take it easy."

"Does Libby fit into this—this idyl?"

"When the time comes, when I'm all set. What do you think?"

"Are you in love with Libby?" she asked. "Really? I mean, really?"

He looked at her. "Now, mom," he said. "Now, mom, there's nothing."

"Don't you go prying again, he meant, trying to find out what goes on under my skin, when you know you never can!" "Come on, mom," he said. "Bring your drink and let's go out on the terrace with dad and Lex."

She shook her head. "Not now. You go along."

"Don't be like that, mom."

"I'm not being like anything. Aunt Marcia will be awake in a few minutes and I want to go up and talk to her."

"Suit yourself." He walked toward the door and then turned around and came back. "Mom," he said, "it will be all right."

She had no idea what he was trying to tell her, what reassurance he was giving her, but for the moment it did not matter. She reached up and pulled his head down to her and kissed him.

"Okay," she said. "Okay."

He went out, and she poured the rest of her Tom Collins into the sink. She did not like to drink alone, and she did not care

much for gin anyway. After prohibition was repealed, she had not enjoyed it for years. She noticed how good it was, or how disgusting it was. She showed her of the stuff they had made in the kitchen at the station with alcohol and juniper berries and something called Stronger Orange-Flower Water (they had never been able to discover whether there was a *Flower Orange Flower Water*) which they mixed with Nedick's orange drink from the stand around the corner.

The Studio. That was the way she and Marcia had always talked about it and the way Zelda always thought of it—in letters. Zelda had taken refuge there with Marcia, just as her sister was taking refuge with her now.

Marcia had said to her at the station, the day she arrived in New York from Framington: "There's not a thing to eat in The Studio. I'm broke till I get paid tomorrow. You have money, haven't you? Let's go to a drugstore and have a bite." She had taken Zelda's suitcase in one hand and her arm in the other. "It's good to see you, kid." You almost make me homesick, you know that?" Her brilliant eyes had tears in them, and Zelda was moved, even though she knew how easily Marcia came. "What happened, anyway? What ever persuaded them to let you come?"

"It was mama's idea," Zelda said. "She had a little trouble with papa at first; he said New York was no place for two girls alone, but she told him it was a better place for two than for one, and she thought it would be nice for you to have company from home for a while."

"That's funny," Marcia said. "She was the one who almost had a fit about me coming. It was papa who said to let me go if I was so set on it."

They walked arm in arm across the vast station floor. Marcia looked different, Zelda thought, like a real New Yorker in only eight months. She wore a black coat and a black cloche hat that Zelda thought was extremely chic. Her own camel's hair coat

and roman striped scarf seemed happier, unsuitable for a girl who was going to live in a New York apartment.

"Well," she said, "I was all ready to go. I got into a mess over a man."

She felt distinctly disappointed as she said this like her small-town girl. Already the bleak pain over Morgan, who had never even called her to find out how she had fared with her parents that night, was subsiding in the excitement of being here.

Marcia looked at her sharply. "What kind of mess?" She lowered her voice, although none of the people hurrying to and from the trains was near enough to hear. "You mean a *real* mess?"

Zelda blushed and reached for her suitcase. "Here, there's no reason why you should carry that. I'm not crippled or anything."

"You're my guest," Marcia said, impatiently jerking the bag around behind her. "Well, answer me."

For an instant Zelda considered elaborating on the affair to suggest that it had indeed been a *real* mess. She had a feeling this would give her stature in her sister's eyes. But she knew she was too poor a liar to carry it off.

"Well," she murmured, "he wasn't really in love with me, you see, and so I—well, I *couldn't*."

Marcia nodded. "It's our upbringing. We're full of inhibitions, and it takes time to overcome them." Zelda wondered whether Marcia had overcome them, but she could not bring herself to ask. Her sister certainly did not look the same, though it might have been only her clothes, and some kind of stuff on her eyes that made them seem bigger and more brilliant than ever. "Tell me what happened," Marcia said. "Who was the fellow?"

Zelda told her, changing things just a little, so that she appeared to have been more pursued than pursuing. "He couldn't keep away from me. I knew the folks would be home any minute, but he wouldn't listen. Afterwards, mama came up and lectured me."

"I know," Marcia said. "All about how you have to keep your-

self for the man you marry. Even a fellow won't respect you if you let him take liberties. Well, I don't know. If they respect you, I don't see why they want to go out with you."

She got the car to a platform at the station. Every stool at the counter was taken, but Marcia swept an expert eye over the luncheon and then beckoned to Zelda to stand with her behind two girls who were down to their Danish pastry and coffee. Zelda, who had eaten on the train, a box lunch of her mother's camp-fried chicken, was not hungry. She thought the pastry looked dry and the coffee watery, and the rag with which the fountain boys wiped off the counter appeared gray and untidy. A wave of homesickness swept over her.

"Pinkie saw that show, 'Saturday's Children,' last week," the girl in front of her said. "She says it's real good. You want to go to the matinee Saturday?"

"I don't know," the other girl answered. "I'm sort of bored."

"We can get fifty-five cent seats. I don't mind the second balcony, do you? Sometimes you can see better from up there."

The girl considered a minute. "Well, all right," she said then. "What theater's it at?"

"The Booth. My office is near there, so I'll get the tickets if you want."

The other girl stopped eating to open her purse and count out the fifty-five cents. Marcia clucked impatiently and audibly, but Zelda did not notice. A show, she thought . . . Saturday matinee . . . the Booth. . . .

In Framington a show meant the moving pictures, playing continuously every day from eleven in the morning until midnight, at the Bijou on Main Street. There was also the River Street Playhouse, but it never exhibited anything but serials, and nobody nice went there, just toughs. Some of the wealthier residents traveled "down to New York" once a year to take in the plays, but the only play Zelda had ever seen, outside of presentations by the high school drama society, was something called, "Come Out of the Kitchen," given in the town hall, where nobody back of the sixth row could hear anything, by a fourth-rate stock company.

that had never visited Framingham before and never come again.

Now she was in New York City, and she had only five cents left in her pocket. She could see, in certain places, where she had seen Lane Carter and George Arliss.

She and Marcia slid into the vacated stools, warm from the girls who were going to see "Saturday's Children," and the attendant unfolded the gray rag over the places where their shoes had been.

"What a place!" Zelda whispered. "Isn't New York wonderful?"

It never really changed her mind from that moment on. The Studio gave her only a temporary setback. She had imagined something large and high-ceilinged, with a skylight through which the rays would pour in a spectacular cone of light. Instead, which a chair would stand, with some fabric, brocade, or red velvet, draped carelessly across its back—and she sat in a paisley smock, standing before her easel in the dingy, dry room, with her palette on her arm.

The studio was on the top floor of a rickety building on West 125th Street. There was no skylight, only one large window, facing north. It was not a small room, but the double studio couch and the two tables and the chairs—two of them overstuffed, with the fillings bulging out of their cretonne slipcovers—crowded the floor and the model stand, made of a packing crate, into an uncomfortable corner. Zelda had forgotten the necessity for living arrangements in this atelier. The bathroom was behind a green curtain, and the idea of cooking there, on a two-burner electric stove that rested on a board placed across the bathtub, sounded

She quickly got used to it. Marcia had a party in the studio the night she arrived. There were no lights except from candles, which melted into dishes with melted wax and placed on the window-sill and the tables. On the model stand there was a huge vase, filled with artificial roses. By candlelight, the roses looked real, and she could see the faded place on the blue studio couch where Marcia had put batik scarfs over the table to hide their

numerous dents and scratches, and shifted some of the dozen or so bottles in the row nearest to the floor, where most of the guests were sitting. He took out one of the bottles. It was improbable that a man named Karamazov with three bottles of white wine, he said he had got from a steward on an ocean liner, had brought it over from England. He showed them all the bottoms of the bottles to prove they had not been corked or tampered with, or changing the contents. Another man, who had a face that looked as if it had been bleached and marcelled, and the hairdolin and sang in a high-pitched, nasal voice.

It was all very Bohemian, Zelda thought, almost exactly the way she had imagined Greenwich Village would be. Most guests were artists, students at various schools around the city, and they argued continually about what they called "form," whether anyone's nose really looked purple in certain lights.

"If I see it purple," a small, shrill girl said, "that's how I'll see it. I don't care how anybody else sees it."

"Well, it all comes down to what you think Art is," she argued. "I mean, is it just something personal that nobody but the artist, or is it some sort of communication between the artist and the world?"

They had a long, noisy discussion about what Art was, which the whisky was passed around frequently and passed in individual paper cups. One couple took cushions and went off to a dark corner, of the room, where they sat among the canvases that were propped against the wall and talked in close and long embrace. Some of the others did not bother with cushions.

Alex, with very short curly hair and an angelic, olive-toned face, looked at her feet and shouted, "Watch! Watch now, your body is about to be a poached egg." She went incredibly limp and then let her arms ooze slowly out from her sides. After holding this pose for a second, she straightened up and looked around excitedly. "I got it that time, didn't I? I knew I could do it. After that last drink, I suddenly understood the essence of a poached egg."

rid of the... "You see, it's different... Waverly."

...to be good, unless I want to go into the real estate business."

Her father, she gathered now, had something to do with real estate. How much, she only understood several days later. When Mr. Waverly pointed out to her the Waverly Building on Fifth Avenue.

"Don't you want to go into it?" she asked Paul.

He stared at her. "Can you imagine me a real estate man?"

"I don't know. I don't know you well enough to say."

"No, probably not." One of the bottles of whisky came and he poured a drink for her and himself. "Anyhow, if anything else being equal, where's the challenge? I'm A. M. Waverly's son, so it's all nice and easy for me and I make a lot of money automatically. You see it, don't you? I mean, what will prove that way?"

Zelda took a gulp of her drink. It tasted just as terrible as any bootleg whisky she had ever drunk. She began to feel a little dizzy, so that Paul's face seemed vague, detached and floating in a cloud of smoke.

"I think it's wonderful," she said, "that you feel like this."

The man with the mandolin was singing, "Blue Skies." The girl who had understood the essence of a poached egg did a dance in the middle of the floor. All at once she began undressing. Her dress accompanied by applause and shrieks, but before she could finish she passed out on the floor. Somebody picked her up and laid her on one end of the couch, and Zelda went over and burst into tears again.

"Why should a man have everything because he inherits his father's money?" someone asked, "and those who work for it have so much less? The wealth ought to be shared."

"There wouldn't be enough to go around. Everybody would be poor instead of some poor and some not."

[illegible]

struggling on the couch. He was much smaller than Morgan Riley, and he would not believe in being trying to get away from him. Her brain was so full of the thought of screaming, but it would not come out. She screamed—this Paul Waverly was her guest, and she would get her off to an awfully bad start. The little girl was afraid of a man.

"Please," she whispered to Paul. "Please."

A strange voice spoke close by, not whispering, and
speaking across the couch, away from her.

"Leave the kid alone," the voice said casually, without a trace of anger. A tall man stood over them in the darkness until Paul had blotted up and disappeared into the gloom of the room. The man sat down next to Zelda. The poached egg girl, still sitting among the cushions, stirred and moaned.

"Are you all right?" the man asked Zelda.

"She held her arms tight across her chest to stop her trembling. "Yes, thank you," she said. She tried to make eye contact with her, but all she could see was the outline of a nose and a good chin. "He seemed so nice, at first. The day I decided to go into the real estate business because he told me to. I thought he—"

"That's all right," the shadowy man broke in. "He's all right as long as he doesn't have a bottle in one hand. If he has a bottle in the other, he's fine. He just doesn't know what he's doing when he's drunk, that's all." He turned his face toward the door. "You're Arthur's sister, aren't you? You're not much older than he is, are you? What do you mean?"

He said, "I don't know."

File # 100-361141 - I don't know about the looks. I don't know.

SECRET

"You're not a doctor."

"She's only two years older."

He laughed again. "Zelda, she's the one who introduced you

me, didn't she?"

"A few months ago. Didn't she mention my name?"

"I don't know. I don't know your name."

"That's right, we weren't formally introduced, were we? My name is Whitton, Alexis Whitton. People call me Lex."

Aunt Martha washed the dishes she and Bill had used for breakfast, and he dried them. The egg plates were very hard to wash because she had soaked them first, the way she knew you were supposed to do. Now, of course, she wished she had bothered. It was like wishing you had kept your desk in order when you were looking for something important and had to pull everything apart to find it. You knew you would have saved time and trouble by doing a little extra work in the first place, but still you went on doing it.

"We went to drive down to the beach this afternoon," Bill said. "If I can get the car?"

"I don't know. Maybe later. I want to stick around a while."

Aunt Martha looked surprised. She never wanted to stick around. "What do you want to stick around for?"

"I don't know," she said again. "Curiosity, I guess. This family has Lex staying here. And I'd like to see Aunt Martha. She's a character."

Aunt Martha was not altogether sure herself why any of this interested her. Usually she moved in a world of her own, apart from the people who lived in the household, or those who came and went, and she was not at all interested in what they did and said affected her. But she often remarked that a murder could be committed in this house, and she would never know it unless she happened to be in the room where the body personally. But the idea of her aunt's first husband, and the two of them staying here, and what happened, intrigued her.

"What goes on?" she said to Bill. "Why don't you tell me what's going on?"

"Well, you know how it is. The kids are all here. But Bill's not. What goes on?"

"She passed the last dish and handed it to Bill. He took it and put it away where it belonged, and she felt warm and happy. She was glad he was going to stick around, because everything might turn out to be pretty dull after all, just another summer with a lot of adults. That was the thing about Bill—he could count on him.

"Well, they spent one summer here about nine years ago," she said, "when they were still married, and it was strictly for the kids. She hoisted herself up to the counter, though she knew her mother didn't like her to sit there, and Bill stood in front of her, listening, twirling the dish towel. "I was only a kid, but I remember it. They yelled at each other all the time, with the windows open and everything, and honestly I'd feel awful when I saw the other kids. I was afraid they'd think it was me and dad."

"Yeah!" he said. "Yeah!"

"You could tell Bill anything, and he'd know how you felt. If you had a row with the family, or a teacher gave you a bad mark, or even if something happened with one of the kids, you didn't have to draw a diagram for him.

"Anyway, they got divorced after that, and then they were both married somebody else, but it was a disaster. Her husband turned out to be an alcoholic, and she had to go to Alcoholics Anonymous and in hospitals and everything, but it didn't do any good. And his wife was always sleeping around."

"Yeah," Bill said. "They're a great couple of pickers."

"I'm not kidding. And now they turn up here every summer. What goes on?" She jumped down from the counter and slipped her hand into his. "Well, let's take a walk in the garden, surprise," she mom said. Oh, wait!" She put her hand on to the knob of the chief around her head. "They'll have a good time like this. I'll give you a comb but my hair first."

He'd go to college, and then, you think he'll go to college?"

"Maybe," she said. "I don't know that." She was silent a minute, then she said, "I don't know."

"Well," he figured he might as well get it over with. "I don't want to go to college anyhow, and he probably won't go to college for long if he did, so why not get in and out of college as soon as you can? Then he can start out in business with me, instead of hanging over his head."

She glanced at him sideways. "You sound as if you'd like to do it too."

"Well, I don't know," he said. "There's another angle. It could be better by the time we're through college, so why not go into it?" He paused. "If they don't get worse and I don't get yanked out of college."

They walked on without speaking. All this had been said between them before in other ways, and there was not much new to say. In a way maybe she was lucky, Ann thought. In a year, by the time Bill would probably have to go, she might think it was too bad, the way she would about anybody else. She was only seventeen. By then, maybe she would have met somebody else, yet maybe, all through with his service, she didn't want to meet anybody else.

"What's the matter?" He turned and looked at her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she said. "You're digging your nails in my hand, I was afraid." He grinned at her. "See a bear, or something?" She looked back at him. "Two bears. A big black bear and a small one. They just zoomed by in a hot-rod."

"You always knew you were missing a few."

They laughed hard, as if at something very funny. They couldn't make each other laugh. Ann had been older than Bill for years, before she and Bill started going out, and they never laughed at the same things.

at Bridget's door. He sat and he waited one who was at the beach last night.

He was not alone. He was with one of those old friends who had been with him since those

times when they got back to the house, everybody was there. The man who would have sneaked inside with Bill, but he was not. He hated to meet a lot of family all at once. The woman started them and called to her.

"Hi, Billy," Ann muttered to Bill under her breath. "I'm going to say how much I've grown. Come on."

But Marcia did not say how much she had grown. She had not then held her off and said, "Darling, you look wonderful," and when Bill was introduced to her she stared at him and smiled, not in an embarrassing way at all; there was something flattering about it. "Hi," she said then, and held out her hand. "Hi, kid." You felt she might have said "kid" to Lex, or to the man she liked. Bill remarked afterwards that he thought she was strictly O.K.

Lex patted the glider next to him. "Come on, Annie," he said. "Sit down."

She went and sat between him and her father. She thought they had both been drinking quite a lot, because their eyes had that look. Somehow she didn't mind the look in Lex, but she hated her father to have it. It made him seem strange, though he was sometimes in a bad humor when he had been drinking, and a drink always put him in a better one. She thought she had humor.

"How have you been, Annie?" he asked her. "I was just looking for the mint one of my Tom Collins."

She had ever called her Annie before. She liked it when Lex said it, but it was silly for dad to call her that. It was what he always called her too.

"I took a walk," she said.

Bill was standing next to Marcia's chair, leaning over her. He was saying. He wasn't talking at all. He seemed to be just itching to get away as he usually did.

came from the house with a little more than a little, those little things that make a difference.

"You're kidding," Mom uttered. "They're out of snow in each hand. 'They're out of snow' is a tell you how long ago I made them."

"Mouthful!" Marcia said with her mouth full. "Just a mouthful. I'm starved. I haven't had a mouthful to eat."

"Marcia has never had a mouthful to eat," Dad said. "That's why she's nothing but skin and bones."

"You're not very gallant," she said. She took them, taking them in with her eyes in a way that she had in front of her mirror later but couldn't do. "There's some kind of psychiatric reason, you know, why I'm so much weight."

"You need a psychiatrist less than anybody I know," Dad said, not in her sarcastic tone at all, but sort of gentle. "You're much, that's all."

"Mind, Marcia," dad said. "You've still got to eat." He took the platter and passed it back to her. "Another one."

"I looked at her aunt. They were always talking about her. She had been as a girl, and they thought she was attractive. Ann couldn't see it. It was the same. The family thought were attractive were the same. Everybody in school went for. The only thing that was her eyes. She really had beautiful eyes. People must have had different ideas of beauty."

"Where," Lex said, "that in poor countries, where there's not enough families and not enough food to go around, where folks in the snow for the winter and where the spring is good as even. Same principle."

She said, "I'll get it for you, Lex."

She said, "I'll get it for you, Lex."

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She said, "I'll get it for you, Lex."

was sipping her drink. Lex had been there for five minutes if any minutes at all.

"What?" Lex asked. "You mean I've been here five minutes and you haven't noticed me?" She took a sip and held her glass up and sipped at it as though she had made the drink right. "For that matter, how do you know anybody knows?"

Lex did not stop to wonder what she meant. She said, "I think we will run along. We thought we might ride down to the beach for a while."

"All right, Annie, if you must," Lex said, "but I'll be here overnight, you know."

But he was not there only overnight. He stayed until Wednesday when he went to Washington, and he came back again on Thursday. Ann's mother thought Rena would walk out with all that extra work, but Rena said Lex was the loveliest gentleman, and no trouble at all. Mom couldn't find out whether he had kissed her or what. "Probably not," she told dad. "He always does mesmerize people."

Dad laughed. "Lex? He's just a good guy, that's all."

They were at breakfast on Friday. Ann was up early to play tennis with Bill before the courts got crowded, but even then she was late.

"Well, Tony," mom said, frowning down into her coffee. "When you talk about Lex you always sound like a mesmerized person." She finished the coffee, her third cup. She drank much more than Lex. "Anyhow, he must have mesmerized me. I don't intend to ask him to come back here for the summer. I'll have to have done it."

Ann was looking at the ads in the newspaper, the ones for the morning. "Why not? He's good company." She looked up at her mother. "But he upsets Marcia. He's the one who made her go to the hospital. If he's around enough I think he'll make her go to the hospital again." She looked at Ann. "You know."

her. "I don't like them," she said, looking at herself in the mirror. "This is family life."

She picked up from the paper and smiled at herself in the mirror. "I don't like them," she said, looking at herself in the mirror. "This is family life."

She couldn't stand her family. It was true. Usually she thought they were all right. Occasionally she got a sort of rush of love for them. But she really couldn't stand them. It made her feel abnormal or something.

She went off to play tennis, and when she got back she called her into her room. She knew this was going to be the talk Marcia had mentioned on the terrace Sunday, and she had been avoiding it all week. She hated little talks. But there was no avoiding it now.

Marcia was brushing her hair at the dressing-table. She had a pretty good dye job, but if you looked closely you could see where it was coming in gray at the roots.

"Look," she said, smiling at Ann in the mirror. "I can still play a pretty good game myself. I was better at tennis than you, though." She leaned forward and pulled the skin of her face from the temples and then wrinkled her nose in the mirror. "I played forward on the high school varsity."

"Silly?" Ann said. She wondered why older people talked about what they had done when they were kids. It made them seem silly, because you could only judge them the way they looked now. When Marcia talked of her high school, Ann saw her with her middle-aged face and her hair in a bun, making a set shot from the middle of the court.

"Is he your man?" Marcia said.

"Not yet," Ann said. "I like him anyhow." She turned to the door. "Are you very much in love with him?" "No," Marcia said. "It is just between two women." "What?" Ann said. "What?" "All to say," she said, "it is just between two women."

kind of thing
about it.

"I don't know, but I can't possibly tell you anything about it," Ann murmured. But in her heart she knew Lex's character and Ann liked her, but she wasn't an expert on love. She knew what her mother said. Her room was near the garage. She knew Lex had slipped out of the house the night before and gone to Washington and gone for a drive. If she was going to get mixed up with Lex again, her advice could be worth anything.

"Give you this for free, Ann," she was saying. "Don't worry. We'd have a good world if everyone was like Lex. It's possible from the time he was born. No one can say Lex hasn't been loved enough himself."

Ann lay down on the edge of the bed. She did not really know what Marcia meant, and yet she had to know. "Do you mean about not rationing love, Ann?" she asked. "I mean, say they like each other, but they don't know if they'll ever marry each other, or if they'll be the same way later on?"

Marcia smiled, and her eyes shone in that way they had when she was what I was talking about, you know."

"What do you think?" Ann persisted. "For example, a girl in school last year who got pregnant. Her parents were too young to marry her or anything, so they had to move away. What do you think of that?" Ann felt sick when she heard about it. She had kept seeing the girl and her boy-friend in the back of a car. She had wanted to tell them, but she couldn't. Any more she was beginning to feel a little impatiently, "You know what I mean?"

"Bill," she said, "I was just thinking about it once in a while, but I never told you and Marcia. Your mother is the one who is worried about it. She says you ought to be a doctor or a lawyer or something. Your mother is the one who is worried about it."

It was the day, Ann thought. She leaned back in her chair, feeling and yet disappointed. Marcia wasn't going to tell her anything. Nobody ever told you anything, not even your mother. You had to decide for yourself, and you had to know what they thought you ought to do. It was the day when she started using lipstick, before she was high school, and she always put it on after she left the house to go to school, before she came back in, because she thought that felt like she was too young to use it. Then later she found out she didn't need it. The same thing had happened with smoking, and she had never particularly liked and had stopped as soon as she knew she was doing it and weren't going to tell her.

Her mother was always telling her that she and Bill should see each other all the time, that she ought to go out with him, feeling that Bill was too young for her and not particularly smart, but that of course it was up to her. Ann was determined her mother would say if she ever asked her what she thought of the kids who didn't wait for marriage. Would she Ann would say for herself?

"I was just thinking about that girl and boy in the back of a car," she said.

"I was just thinking me," she said to her aunt. "I was just thinking about you thought, that's all. Just in general, I mean. She was just the one she had said at the beginning of the conversation. 'Bill is a nice boy.'"

Mrs. Brown said, "That's old enough for anything—anybody can be in the army."

It was the day she always told her mother, and now Mrs. Brown was saying to her that she didn't know exactly what she was saying. She said that she was just thinking about it. It was the day she always told her mother, and now Mrs. Brown was saying to her that she didn't know exactly what she was saying. She said that she was just thinking about it.

argument, he said, "I don't know whether your conclusion is right or not, but I think you've made a mistake in assuming that people like me are going to be any more like you than they are like anybody else. I don't really know whether they could ever like anybody, but I don't think they're going away to college in the fall, and so on. I don't know much of each other then," she said. "We're all just like we are now."

"When I was your age, I wanted everyone to think I was a genius of the world. I'd never have admitted I was like you," she said. "It probably wouldn't have been true, anyway."

The conversation was beginning to make Ann uncomfortable. She was relieved when Rena knocked on the door and told her she was wanted on the phone. She got up to go, but her mother waved her back to her seat and picked up the extension on the night table.

"Hello," she said. "Oh, Paula, for heaven's sake! It's wonderful to hear from you. I was going to call you as soon as I got home. . . I don't know, exactly—maybe all summer. . . Lex? . . . as a matter of fact I've seen him quite recently. What does he ask? . . . Oh? Oh, really? Oh, well, I guess he's after in Washington—something in the State Department. I suppose they investigate anyone in line for . . . Who? Henry Deltett? Well, I must say that's going a little far. . . I haven't seen her in years, have you? Yes, I suppose so. If they questioned you, they'll certainly be after me. . . I'll thank you for letting me know. I'll give you a ring, maybe next week, and meet you in town for lunch. . ."

She hung up and sat looking out the window. She had forgotten Ann was there. Ann put her hands under her chin and sometimes when she could not manage to sleep, she would feel her stomach felt queer. It was a feeling she had felt a long time ago—a feeling associated with Henry Deltett.

"What was that?" she asked. She was sure she had heard Ann say that her aunt did not seem as much as she was.

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Looking over the melons, which Mr. Zerk called "sweet like sugar," when she saw Libby Green pushing a basket down the aisle toward her. She didn't know her yet, and Zelda thought of escaping into the next moment, but she was afraid she couldn't without making a fool of herself. All she had to do was appear unwilling to talk to her, and she would antagonize Jim, perhaps forever.

My parents had never worried about antagonizing me. They had spoken their minds and done as they pleased. It was up to the children not to antagonize them. Everything was so much simpler then. You knew what was going on. You were a parent, and you told your children to do what you said and them if they didn't. Now right and wrong are all mixed up with the individual psyche, and only an expert can tell you what that is.

She would have liked to express herself on the German, but she was sure she never would say anything especially the matter with Libby. She was from a nice family. It was just that Zelda could

"Why, Mrs. Halliday," she said, in her upper-middle-class Junior College accent, "I didn't know you showed up at an all-day League of Women Voters meeting for this." She laughed softly. "I didn't mean to."

She was not at all pretty, but she had attractive features. She had dark skin and very dark blue eyes, and her hair was very excellent. Tony said she was what he called "built," an expression that Zelda thought was

going to that meeting myself, if I can't go, I'll have

she told the girl she had said it. She had not said it, she said, she had not enough money to buy a dress like that, and there was no one to be a maid to her. "Don't you know," she said, with a heavy-handed cynicism that was not at all at all. This girl certainly did not bring out the best in her.

"I was here for almost two years," Libby said. "I was just here in January." She stood wheeling the market basket, and she was not nervous but with a kind of rhythmic grace. There was nothing in her attitude to suggest that she, like the young people, was eager to get away from a tiresome middle-aged woman. She was too poised for a girl of nineteen, Zelda thought. She behaved like a woman of experience, but doubtless it was only a manner, taught at Junior College. "I hear Ann's going to be an assistant counselor at the day camp this summer." She was maneuvering closer to Jim now. In a minute she would be in his frame very naturally and casually. "That'll be a nice thing for her."

"Yes, I think it will," Zelda said. "What are your plans for summer?"

"I'm going to work in my father's office." She smiled, showing tiny, even white teeth. Zelda, for some reason that she was unable to trace, always associated such teeth with stupidity. "Like Libby said."

Zelda spoke quickly. "I wish you'd persuade him not to." This was not done for it, certainly, here at a chance meeting in the market, the two of them standing in the aisle with their backs pressed against the shelves to let people pass. But then, what difference did it make where you talked about such things? What did the place have to do with it? You could go into the library, if you had a library, or into any of the many trading places for "talking something over," and if you were going to go anywhere, it wouldn't do any good that you were in the market.

Libby's eyes widened. "You mean you don't know him?" she in-
quired.

"I don't know him," she said. "I don't know him at all."
She was so distressed. If you know him at all, you know him

Libby smiled again. "I know him very well," she said.

She knew at once that it was not going to be any more. She
worry she had spoken, put herself in the position of a girl
who had no influence on her son appealing to her. She
had. Libby wanted him to work for Tony. Of course, she
probably given him the idea, insisted on it, because it was the
quickest way for her to marry him and live comfortably
no concern for the future. If it had not been for this, she
never so willingly go into something that he had chosen
he did not expect to like.

"I don't think you ought to worry," Libby said. "Jim's not
settled up right now, but he'll be all right; he'll find himself."
The little snip, Zelda thought, reassuring her, explaining her
to her. He'll find himself. I'll bet he will. He'll find himself
you want him to find.

"Thanks," she said. "Thanks, anyway."

She had meant it to be sarcastic, but instead it sounded like
a compliment. Probably it was just as well. She didn't want to
tell Jim with the story that his mother didn't like him. If
there was any possibility of fighting this girl, it would be better
something more subtle than sarcasm. Still, it was better
she was always weakening and being agreeable when she
intended not to be. There was some power in her
she suspected—that kept her from following through with
whatever anger or indignation or unpleasantness she
wanted. She could be nasty only up to a point, then
she backed down.

"I'll talk to Jim," Libby said, "but I don't want to do
it. He's too mixed up," she repeated.

was not a girl who could be easily won. She was not a girl who had loved longer than any of the others. He had been in love since he was sixteen, and he had known that eventually he was going to marry the girl. But Zelda had found this amusing and rather touching. He was casual, almost frivolous, about everything, yet he was serious and steadfast.

She had tried to believe that he would get over Libby to get someone else, but she knew now that it was not going to happen as easily and spontaneously as it always had before. All Libby had her soft little claws in him, and she did not intend to let go. She intended to clinch things as quickly as possible by agreeing to it that he took the job that would bring immediate and unquestionable security.

She had planned to marry him before he went to the front, so that she would be sure of getting him, but she was willing to bet that she did not expect to follow him to any of his camps. She would stay home in her parents' house in Haddon Hills (a house, according to her father, that the Germans could not have afforded any more if they had wanted it free and clear) and wait for him, and the time would not miss out on any fun in the meantime. She took a cigarette from the package wedged up in the top drawer and held it in her mouth impatiently, tasting the tobacco while the lighter warmed up. As soon as she had a few puffs she felt better. How venomous I am, she thought, now I am over her cub.

She supposed, Libby was all right. She only bet that the other girls did when they had an attractive boy to marry. They didn't want to lose him. The point was that she was wrong. Just as Tony's office was wrong for him, not because it was warm and gay and bright, someone who is in love with himself—not this humorous, not

rather dull than she was, and she would have been almost certain to have been

the first to have thought and felt that way. But she had been so much so that it had worried her, and she had not been able to keep her reactions to his friends or his problems from being too heavy on her too heavily and not learn to make her own decisions. Then all at once—or it had seemed all at once—she had been able to do it—he not only no longer asked her to do it; he objected to it when she gave it. Now, then. Now it was good, of course. It was healthy. She wouldn't have minded it any other way. Only now, just now in this matter of it, she wished she could have the influence on him that she had once had.

She parked the car in the driveway and went inside. It was beginning to get hot, and the house had that cave-like coolness that came in late spring, after the furnace was turned off and the outdoor heat had permeated the walls. She felt soothed, and the sight of Ann, fast asleep on the sofa, did not irritate her. It might have some other time, but gave her a feeling of rest.

Ann was just a little girl, playing at love with a gangly boy. Next year she would go away to college and meet other boys and learn to dress properly. She would grow up and forget all about this. It was foolish to worry over Ann, with her cheeks flushed with childish pinkness and roundness against the soft shadow of the little freckles sprinkled across her nose.

Zelda decided against kissing her; it would only make her feel awkward. She stood out and went through to the terrace, where she found the gardener, weeding the rose bed, kneeling in the dirt in a blue uniform, a cigarette hanging from one corner of her mouth. "You don't have to do that," Zelda called to her. "The gardener comes tomorrow."

She sat back on the grass and wiped off her face. Her hands were dirty and her face was shiny with perspiration, and she was too heavy for slacks, even such beautiful ones as she

order, and she was a little better, anyway. She always looked attractive, and she was a little better, anyway.

"I guess you're right," Marcia said. "I guess you're right."

"I should tell him. The poor roses."

"I should tell him. I'm scared to death of him," Zelda said. "I should tell him. I'm scared to death of him."

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Marcia said nothing, and Ann said nothing, and they all went to do

nothing, and Ann said, "What's the matter by that?"

"I don't know," said Marcia, "but it's quite a summer."

She looked out the back window, her face sudden

ly coming over to Joan's and spend the night, all right."

"She's getting some of the kids together for a party."

"That's all right," Zelda said.

She disappeared from the window, and Marcia

said, "You sound so grudging? Don't you like Joan?"

"I don't know I sounded grudging," Zelda thought.

"I did. I guess it's because I usually let her do what she

wants to do, yet I can't help feeling that parents are really

not saying no. So I compromise by saying yes half-heartedly."

"But if she asked you whether she could have an affair with

you, would you say yes half-heartedly?"

She looked toward the window where Ann's sleepy face

was. She wished suddenly that she had kissed her.

She was on the couch, even if it had wakened her. Perhaps

she would have had the warm, fresh, milky smell she had had

when she was little and Zelda had gone in to pick her up.

Of course she wouldn't have. She smelled of

scented bath powder and scented shampoo and

afternoon like this, of perspiration.

"The question isn't likely to come up," Zelda said.

She looked amused. "I believe I've shocked you."

"What? The idea must have occurred to you. She

was spending half her time with a grown boy. You

must have thought of yourself. Anyhow, I know I was." She

said, "And they're going to be separated in the

next summer."

"You're frightening me," Zelda looked

at her, the eyes carefully made-up, mascaraed

in the middle of the afternoon in the

around the house, and she said she loved her very much. "I

still love her," she said, "and I think they're different, and I'm glad—"

She said, "I'm not, because they don't seem to have

any of the daring or the ambition that we had. Some-

times I'm sorry for them because they seem so cautious and

they weren't young at all, and sometimes I'm impatient

because I want them to get something out of life and they

don't. Now it seems to me they won't—and then other times

when I don't know them at all, anything about them, any-

thing. The parents knew us, and that they're not what they

were, and there's nothing I can do to help them."

"I don't know," Marcia said. "I think you make it too

much of it. I think if you just love them as much as possible

from the time they're born, and they know it and feel it, they'll

turn out all right."

"Yes," Zelda said, and laughed. "For you, that's the

best thing."

"I don't know if it is?"

Zelda did not reply. How could she expect Marcia to

reply? Marcia had never felt responsible to anyone or for

anything. She had married two men, and left them when

she no longer be happy with them. She had always been

in a situation that made her unhappy or with which

she did not know how to cope. But it was not so easy for most

people. They could not, for instance, leave your children. Nor

could they hope they'd turn out all right. They

had to help and guide them, not in the old forthright

way, but subtly and carefully, so that they did not

feel they were being helped or guided. And Marcia thought

that was the best thing.

"I don't know," Zelda said, "have you heard from

"He telephoned a few minutes ago and said he'd be here tomorrow."

"What time?"

"He didn't say. He said he'd be here tomorrow."

"What time?"

"He didn't say. He said he'd be here tomorrow."

"What time?"

"He didn't say. He said he'd be here tomorrow."

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a big, black, hairy man, but for Lex, well—"

"You're an awful fool to get mixed up with him," she said. "If you haven't sense enough, maybe I ought to be the one. When he comes tomorrow, I ought to make it his headquarters for the rest of the summer. You can't stop me from being a fool, Zel. I'm too big for you now. Anyhow, I suspect we're all going to be mixed up with Lex for a while, whether we like it or not. He says they do a thorough job. They'll even ask what newspapers read." She picked another blade of grass and blew a blast between her thumbs. "They'll dig pretty deep, and some of it won't be pleasant for any of us."

Zelda saw suddenly that she was upset. "What's the matter?" she asked gently. "Are they likely to dig up something you want to keep buried?"

"It could be," Marcia said. Zelda was sure it could. There were periods in Marcia's life about which she knew nothing. Knowing Marcia she was sure they had not been empty. And she herself admitted, she had always been a fool. "Everyone's got to be just as soon keep buried," Marcia added, looking at Zelda and then away again. "Paula said she was afraid of Nancy."

Zelda froze. She said, "Nancy?" as if she did not know what it meant. But Marcia said nothing. She knew Zelda. "What?" Zelda asked after a minute, "has Nancy Deller

... through Lex that she got the job in Tony's office. But I can't imagine why she should interest Tony. I'm going to ask about everyone Lex ever knew. I'll get a cigarette from the stub of the one she's finished smoking. Her hands were shaking. "Why did

was... that might...

Della's business had been over long time. It had to do with Lex's job in the State department. What could it have to do with anything any more? She turned on her side and stared through the darkness at Tony's picture on her dresser. Unless it was never had never been over.

She was a fool, she told herself. Of course it's over. It was six years.

The picture smiled at her. It looked very little as Tony now. His hair had been thicker and his face had been more round, with only a hint of the leanness that made him more attractive later. He wore a moustache in the old, neatly-clipped, British kind of moustache that would look now much better than it had then.

"Don't know why you keep that photograph out," Tony had said a few weeks ago. "It belongs hidden in the past along with the other ancestors."

"I like it," she had told him. "I like to remember when I met you. After all, I can see how you

moustache had been a conversation piece. She had seen him wear it, and had expected that he would say it made him look older. It was the only reason she knew he should wear a moustache, unless he was going to grow a beard with it.

"Don't like it?"

"I guess."

"If you don't like it, I'll shave it off."

There this was the first time they had

When he came to the office without the beard, she was very tender toward him, and, although she would much later, it was the beginning of her love for him. She had hovered so meekly and preciously about him of love with two men, first Morgan Riley and then Tony, she had had so little influence or impact on their lives that she had her pride to have Tony shave off his moustache. She disapproved.

She told Marcia about it that night, after they came home from a spaghetti dinner at the Italian Gardens in the corner. They no longer cooked anything but spaghetti on the electric stove in the bathroom. Marcia was always there when she made \$35 a week modeling fur coats in a fur store on Avenue. As she explained, "You can't put a mink on a \$14.95 dress." But Zelda could wear almost anything she wanted, so her \$25 a week stretched.

The studio was not as cluttered as it had been a year ago. It did not look much like a studio at all any more. The easel stood in one corner with a half-finished painting. In the same half-finished painting that had been there for years. Zelda had asked Marcia once whether she ever painted on it again, and her sister had said, "No, but it's a good effect. If you live in the Village it looks better. You're an artist."

"You mean you've been pretending right along?"
"I didn't know it in the beginning, but I have. Sometimes they were invited out for dinner, but they never came to the Italian Gardens for seventy-five cents and coffee. The Italian Gardens was not a very nice place, but if you were known you could get a very nice wine, commonly known as D.O.M. or D.O.M. or D.O.M."

...and Marcia and
...the new machine was
...shot.

...a humorous anecdote out of the
...the moustache, telling it to Marcia as though
...Amused. Actually she hoped to impress Marcia
...over men. She was not popular in New York
...been in Framington. She had dates now and
...she had Lex, but the phone did not ring for
...as it did for Marcia. Her sister, she felt, was
...in her and sorry for her, and so she played up the
...and made Tony sound more attractive than
...around him. It was possible that she convinced herself
...he began to seem more attractive to her from that

...why Lex has never brought him around to meet
..."It seems they've been friends for years."
...and not find out why until long afterwards. She
...that Tony had not cared about meeting any girls,
...a girl, a beautiful girl named Nancy Fuller, who
...Avenue, and who had told him the night before
...lunch that she had decided not to wait for him
...Walter Dellett.

...ever know Lex to bring a man around?"
...and laughed. "He likes a clear field."
...dressing for her bath. They had met at
...work and were still in the clothes they had
...let everything drop on the floor, her knitted
...to all the splendid curves of her body, the
...teddies with her name embroidered on
...stockings and the blue Shirred silk
...They lay in a var-colored pool at
...perhaps until the next morning. In

ning it. "I'll be home around eleven," she said.

"I'll be home around eleven," she said.

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...had been waiting here all evening for Lex and his mother to come in for dinner with him before Marcia came, but nothing happened.

Zelda thought of calling him back, but she didn't. She looked at herself with dissatisfaction in the mirror. She had gone out in a knee-length black satin dress that was wonderfully seductive and sophisticated, but even now, after having been becoming to Zelda she could not have worn it. She could not appear to be dressing up for Lex, who was her brother's sister. This was as far as she could go, this was her limit. She wore a short skirt and pleated white silk blouse. The skirt showed off her narrow hips and her small waist, but the blouse did nothing for anything at all. Someone had once told her that she was a typical John Held girl, and she had always been proud of it. She thought that Marcia was too fat, but now she would have liked something to change with Marcia.

Zelda lay down on the studio couch and looked at a movie on the screen. There was a picture of Vilma Banky on the first page. She didn't look like a John Held girl either. Of course she didn't, and foreign women never did. There was a picture of Valentino on the same page. He was handsome, the type; and he had what Marcia called "bedroom eyes." He was humming "The Sheik." The words that were in her mind were not the words that had been written on the screen. It was a parody. She wondered what her parents thought. They knew she knew a parody like that. They thought she was a nineteen didn't know anything.

Zelda had persuaded them to let her stay on in New York. She had a good job and was so happy. For an hour she had been thinking of Zelda's mind that she had never been so happy. Then the doorbell rang, and she knew

...and was a year or two under than Jim. But Jim was
...a boy. He had enjoyed life, and he
...and he had not been afraid to take
...known his way around and been sure of
...going. Jim was a confused, cautious boy immu-
...young. Could he possibly grow to manhood in the
...erated. In three years he would probably be

...balled her mind away from that. Ever since the
...gone through when he was eighteen and she had
...might draft him any minute, she had determined
...again until she had to. Everything changed so
...might not have to go at all, and even if he did
...be in any kind of danger. She was not going
...suddenly again.

...picture had been taken about a month before
...she and Tony had together. He had given it to
...her, and written on the back, "To Delilah from
...". A few months after that he had given her
...the moustache, and written on it, "All my love

...my love. But you never gave anybody all your love
...always some left over, waiting. It took only a
...a certain mood, a certain set of circumstances
...ready with it, ready for someone else.

...there had been no Morgan Riley and no Lee
...had behaved differently—if Tony had gone
...business so that Nancy would not have had
...not shaved off his moustache . . .

...serious foundation for a marriage, and yet
...better than most. You could make a
...not anybody, she thought. It was

...now it would have been if she, instead of Lex, had been married. Perhaps they'd be together still, and she would have been instead of Tony on the 5:23. It was a possibility, though. She did not think that she, or any woman, could have domesticated Lex that completely. Yet it was possible to have some sort of satisfactory marriage with something that would make up in excitement what it lacked in love. She supposed that was what he and Marcia had. Marcia's temperament had been different, if she could have been sleeping with him all the time, it might have been different. He didn't much character, in the old-fashioned sense of the word, in a firm company and he was kind. Maybe that was why she

...knocked on the door. She thought of not answering, but to be asleep, but she couldn't do it, any more than she could ever let the telephone ring. It might always be a possibility.

"What is it?" she inquired.

"Ann."

She smiled to herself. When Ann telephoned, she always said "This is Ann," as though Zelda might not know her. In her early years away at summer camp, she had written her letters, "Love, Ann Halliday." It was as though she had to establish and hold on to her identity because she was so young.

"What's dear," Zelda said. "I thought you had gone to bed." She opened the door. "I'm just going." She peered into the hall and then came in. "What's the matter? Has anything happened?"

"Nothing. It's almost better."

"What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing. I'm just a little against the pillows and looked a little better."

"I'm not threatening me," Zelda said, but she gave Ann a little note of consideration, but Ann was being sarcastic again. Ann did not like her. "Sit down," Zelda said, and patted the bed. There was still an awkwardness about her, a real uncertainty. When she was overwrought, she said. Now she perched on the edge of the bed, which she had never been near it before and was afraid it might be. Marcia says the F.B.I. is investigating Lex.

"They say they're going to be asking us questions," she said. "I suppose someone will be around. It's a matter of when. Who applies for a job in the State department. That will be very exciting." She smiled. "I'm afraid you'll be questioned at all."

In the half light, Zelda could see Ann's face red. "I'm not anxious to be questioned," she said. "I'm old, wanting to play cops and robbers." She said. "I guess I'll go."

"Sit down, Ann. Don't be so touchy." Zelda said. "My headache's coming back."

Ann was a little ashamed of herself, using such a word. She was who got heart attacks whenever they were threatened. But Ann was so difficult sometimes and moody and unreasonable. If she happened to be exactly right, it was possible to laugh at her. But if she was wrong, you could never be sure whether she was exactly right. Evidently this was not one of those times. Her headache might be some protection.

"Why," Ann said stiffly. She did not sit down. "I'm not going." "I was just curious about what Lex was doing." "That's all. I thought I might learn something."

"Let us know it. I mean, if he were a Communist, it's a particular point of reading 'The Daily Worker'. Don't you know that in Westchester you can be caught with 'The Daily Worker'?"

"No, then. You know what I mean. I can't ask questions like that. If he were a Communist, and we had sympathy with him, we wouldn't tell the truth, and if we had sympathy with him he wouldn't tell us the truth. We don't know anything."

"I don't only to find out if he's a Communist, of course. I want to know what kind of man he is, whether he could be blackmailed. But you might be an investigator when he comes that he's probably just, well, asking us such things about Lex. Maybe you can tell him to go away."

Just as she had said this last, Zelda knew it was the kind of comments that Ann would find objectionable. Zelda had said so many things her parents did and said objectionable. Her mother would have thought of objecting. Every time her father had told her she had too much "patience" she had hated the silly, old-fashioned word, and been annoyed at the constant repetition, and she had used as much make-up as she could in spite of it, but she had never suggested to her father to change his manner of speech or his ways. If she had had authority, she knew she might not get along with him so well, but it would not have occurred to her to suggest that he get along with her.

But, however, Ann did not appear to notice anything. She was preoccupied.

"I don't want to ask any personal questions, anything like that," she said. "There wouldn't be much point in that."

I wish you wouldn't talk that way. I wish you wouldn't be sarcastic. I hate sarcasm."

Zelda sighed. "You'd better go along to Joan's. I wasn't here to see you."

"Probably, if I thought back. What about you?"

"Me?" Ann laughed. "I'm only seventeen."

"Sometimes that's old enough."

"Oh, mother, for heaven's sake, what do you think I am?"

"You're always asking that," Zelda said. "Sometimes I'm the one of the answer."

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"Oh, mother, for heaven's sake, what do you think I am?"

and she was the first to tell him that she and child of the same age. She had been with him since the time he was born and then said it was just a matter of time before they would be straight loved each other. This was one of the announcements that still stood, though so many of them had been discounted since the twenties.

She wondered whether Tony and Jim were antagonistic. Could they annoy her and make her angry, but it was never quite as deep as with Ann, never as deep. She must ask Tony some time. Generally, he did not like to discuss such subtleties of emotion, but in certain moods she could get him to talk about anything. She might even, if she wanted to, get him to talk about Nana's death.

Jim took the train into New York with his father on Monday morning. Usually Tony got to the office at 9:45, but he could allow an employee, especially his son, to arrive that late. They took the 8:16, which would get them in by 9:00.

His father, Jim saw, did not know many of the men on the train. One or two greeted him and asked him what he was doing so early, and he had to explain about Jim. He sounded quite fatuous, as if there were something remarkable about having a son old enough to work in the office with you, but he probably couldn't help sounding that way. There wasn't much you could say in a situation like this.

They did not go into the same car as any of the men who knew his father. Tony took the seat near the window, though only a few years ago he automatically would have let Jim have the window seat, and opened the paper he had bought at the newsstand and then folded it up again.

"Well," he said, "I'm glad we have air-conditioning, in case the day is going to be a scorcher."

"A good day for the beach," Jim said, and then knew it was time to stop talking. He was not supposed to be thinking about the beach.

the beach. "What do you think of this, Jim?" he added quickly. "Don't you think it's a good idea?"

"I don't know," replied the younger man. "Don't you think so?" He glanced at the front page for a few moments and then turned to the inside. He had often told Jim that he could look at a whole column at once and get the sense of it. He found it hard to believe anyone could do that. "Here's the thing I was telling you about," he said, folding a page in half and handing it to Jim. "See what you think of it."

Jim did not remember that his father had told him about the thing, and the piece itself failed to jog his memory. There was a picture of a man in his library. He wore a polo outfit and he had the right build for it, and one of those athletic uppercrust faces that went with a game like polo. He had one foot on a chair and in his hand a glass of what the copy said was a certain kind of whisky, the drink of sportsmen. His other arm was in a sling. Nothing in the copy explained why.

"It's very striking," Jim said cautiously.

Evidently that was all right, because his father said eagerly, "Isn't it? Everybody who sees it is going to wonder about that arm sling and read the ad to see if he can get the story. Make my words, the man with the sling will be famous, and so will the whisky he drinks."

Jim didn't say anything. He wanted to ask whether this was his father's idea, but he was afraid he might have been told in the conversation which he could not remember.

When they got to Mt. Vernon, Tony handed him the first part of the paper while he read the financial news. Jim was not much of a newspaper reader. At college he and his roommate subscribed to the Herald Tribune because the fellow who handled the subscription was a good guy and needed the money, and Jim usually read the headlines and sometimes, if he wasn't too busy, a couple of the columns, but he preferred hearing the news on the radio. It got a faster that way and better, he thought, without having to wade through a lot of dull writing.

When they had started the draft business and

directly at him, but he had read all pretty carefully, but not the last page about the year out. He had thought it was more anyhow. If they decided all right to go to the office tomorrow, the most he'd lose was a year. So he thought he wouldn't wait the year out in any case. He'd just get it over with. One thing, if he did that he would have to explain why he wasn't making Phi Beta like Dad. He was nowhere near it. So you made Phi Beta. So what? You were still killing yourself rushing in to an office every day when you were forty-seven years old. He wanted to retire long before that and travel and ski and swim and take it easy.

The train pulled into the tunnel and his father took out a pack of cigarettes and offered him one. He took it and held it in his mouth a few minutes before they reached the station and then he lit it when Tony lit his. All around them men were lighting cigarettes, putting their jackets back on, pulling briefcases down from the racks over their heads. Most of them looked tired before the day started, as if they were thinking that it was only the beginning of Monday and it would be five days before the weekend. The women seemed fresher, more as if they liked the jobs they were going to, but it might have been only the make-up.

"Here we are," Jim's father said. He put his hand on Jim's shoulder for a minute. "Let's go." He wasn't much on sentimentality as a rule, but sometimes, when you least expected it, he could be sort of foolish about something. Now he sounded as if this was a Big Moment, instead of just the first day of a summer job.

Jim had been to the office many times, of course, ever since he was a little kid and his father had brought him down to see him off. Once he had dropped in on a Monday morning, after a long weekend in New York, to borrow enough money to get back to school. He hadn't told anyone he was going to be there and he hadn't gone home or even called, but his father was still working about it at all, just grinned and handed him the money. Maybe it was a crazy thing, but Jim would have

It had been the last time he had seen her. He had been

in New York, at the Madison Avenue, a few blocks from

the city. It took up the whole sixteenth floor of the building.

The waiting-room was glass and natural wood panelling and the

chairs that curved around your spine and your

On the wall of the waiting-room was a picture of

fruit. It was an original Cezanne and it had cost \$3,500.

It was \$3,500? Anyhow, it had cost a lot of money. But

it was supposed to be worth it because if you could spend all that

on a painting, it showed everybody you must be a pretty

advertising agency.

His father put him to work the first day cutting out the

ads from newspapers and periodicals and pasting them

different books. He was supposed to read them over as he

and "get the feel of them." It was not a bad job. Once he

found the ad, he could think of anything he wanted to write

was cutting and pasting. He could think of Libby, of kissing

after a swim, and the way her skin felt, cool and slippery and

smelling of salt and sun and a little, still, of the powder she

or the perfume, or whatever it was

Maybe he ought to marry her right away. There were fathers

college who were married and living in Hanover with their

was. They'd have a year that way, anyhow, before he

grad. Maybe that was what he ought to do. The only trouble

was he was only twenty years old; he wouldn't be twenty-one

until November, and that was pretty young to get married. He

had been on his own, in a way, for three years at college, but

it wasn't the same as being married. When you were married,

you were the head of the whole works, you managed everything,

you were responsible for everything, and there wasn't anybody

to let you know if you weren't handling it right or wrong.

But if you got jammed up. You had to be pretty smart

to pull it all that before you were twenty-one. He wasn't

that smart. Maybe after a stretch in the army, he'd be

for it.

She was not really a girl. She was probably thirty or forty years older than he was, and not so much pretty as smart. She had a trim with a narrow, keen, high-cheekboned face. "That must be Jim Halliday," she said.

"That's right."

She held out her hand. It was narrow like her face and when he took it, it felt strong and cool.

"Welcome," she said. "I'm Hallie Breed. I'm supposed to be a copywriter around here, but I do a little of everything, as you can see. Any help to you, let me know."

"Thanks," he said. "I will."

She came and looked over his shoulder at what he was doing. "Ah!" she said. "Busy work. They had me doing it too when I first came." She patted his cheek. "Well, don't let it get you down. Some day you'll be a great big advertising executive like your father." It might have been an offensive remark, but she smiled when she said it and winked at him, so it wasn't. After a moment she said, "Take me out to lunch some time," and then she was gone.

He thought about her for a while, and he decided he had never met anyone so attractive in a long time. It would be fun to take her out to lunch. He would tell Libby about it, and explain that in the advertising business even married men took women out to lunch all the time, because that was where a good deal of the business was conducted, over the lunch table or in the office. And he would amuse Libby with snatches of his interesting conversation with Hallie Breed. She always liked to hear about things like that.

His father called him on the inter-office phone at twelve-thirty and asked how he was doing.

"I can't eat with you today, Jim," he said. "I have a meeting. Go over to the Whitney and tell Max, the bookkeeper, to tell my son and he'll see you get a table. Order."

gathered around the table, and he got some place to sit. He was not a waiter, as long as he was there, he was a customer, as long as he was there, he was a customer, as long as he was there, he was a customer. He always ate ice cream that way, always had a kid. Libby would like it here, he thought, but it wouldn't really fit in, any more than he did. She'd been to the places like Twenty-one and the Stork, but this was different. At the next table a man in a very light tan, almost yellow, tropical worsted suit was saying, "The trouble is you have them meet too cute in the first scene. It's all right to have them meet, but not as damn cute as all that." Jim didn't know what he was talking about, and Libby wouldn't have known either.

But he was sure Hallie Breed would have. She had the look about her as the other women in here. She was more attractive than any of them, and younger, but she had the same quick, keen, know-what-it's-all-about look. He would have enjoyed lunching here if she were with him.

He got back to the office before two, and went into the room where he was told the meeting was to be. No one was there yet. He didn't know what chair he was supposed to take at the long polished table, and he felt foolish in the big room all by himself, so he went out again.

Several girls were typing outside. They were using electric typewriters, and he stood and watched the speed and ease with which the machines went along. Something seemed to be wrong with one of them. Two men had it upside down and were looking at its insides, while the stenographer watched.

"Mind if I take a look at it?" Jim asked.

The men glanced up. One of them smiled. "Go ahead, you know any more about it than we do." The other one, an older, grayer old man, but wearing a suit that was cut for a college guy, said, "That wouldn't take much."

Jim took off his jacket and laid it on the floor. He had never seen one of these electric jobs before. It couldn't be very complicated. "What's the matter?" he asked the girl.

"It just doesn't go any more. It was all right all morning, but now it just won't go."

Jim explored the machine with careful fingers, whistling under his teeth. He was disappointed when, in a few minutes, he found the loose wire. He had thought that maybe he was going to take the whole thing apart.

"That's it," he said, stepping back, wiping his hands on his pocketkerchief.

"Well, what do you know?" the younger man said. "A mechanic in our midst. That's something new. A mechanic in the advertising business."

Jim didn't like him much. The older one was all right, but the new one was a wise guy. It turned out later that he was one of the best salesmen in the business, but Jim still thought he was a wise guy. The old one was a layout man and Jim had an idea maybe he was a pansy, but he was all right anyhow.

People were going into the meeting room now, and in a moment Jim saw his father and joined him.

"Hello, Jim," Tony said. "Have a good lunch?"

He did not wait for an answer, but hurried in and took a seat at the head of the table, the only chair with arms. He spread a batch of papers out in front of him. Jim stood until everybody else was seated, and then he took the chair next to him.

There were four other men besides his father and himself. A woman, Hallie Breed. She smiled at him and nodded, and he felt better about being there, more as if he had a right to be there.

"All-right, now, let's get going on this," his father said, in his irritable, unfamiliar voice. "You know what we've got until tomorrow at four o'clock to do."

could be used to bring in the cash with the picture.

"That's a visual," another man said, in a complaining

voice. "How are we going to put it across on

TV? It's so definitely *visual*? Now on TV, it would be

Tony rapped on the table with his pencil. "All right,

he said, "TV's out. Culverton doesn't like TV. Let's not

say

"We could say," Hallie Breed suggested, "Who is the

with the sling?" and go on from there."

"We could," Tony said, "but I don't think it would sell Cul

for whisky."

Hallie shrugged and smiled faintly. "It was just an idea."

"All right," Tony said. "All right. That's what we

idea. Keep them coming, even if you think they're no good.

We've produced some of our best stuff that way, haven't we?

One of something that seemed to stink when we started."

Jim had once been with a friend who was in delirium, and

had the eerie sense of watching someone become an altogether

strange and different person before his eyes. He felt the same

strangeness now. Nothing about his father was familiar. He

even looked different. There were lines in his face that Jim had

never seen before, and his eyes had almost the same cold,

trained, feverish look as the delirious friend.

Jim remembered seeing a movie about a meeting like this

at a marketing agency. The head of that agency had been a

man who scared everybody to death and spit on the table when

he didn't like something. Jim could see that some of the things

that were said made his father feel like spitting, but he certainly

never would do that. He used words instead, but thought

that they thought everybody there would hate him, and

didn't seem to mind much. In fact, they were soon popping

ideas out that Jim lost track of what was going on. It was

a little like a Scotchman, but he was a little more toward
the English side. He began to feel a little more at home
when he saw the man with the sling.

It all seemed a little silly to him. Everybody all over the
place was buying this over a lousy commercial. He didn't see why
anybody would buy Culverton whisky just because some guy in the
middle recited some fool jingle like, "Culverton's the drink for
you. Try it too and you'll agree." He didn't get the man with
the sling business at all. What was the big mystery? The guy
lost off his polo pony and broke his arm, or somebody swung
him with a mallet and broke it that way, or maybe he got it
wrong. Who cared? Even if people started talking about the
man with the sling, the way his father seemed to think they
should, Jim was willing to bet most of them wouldn't remember
that he had anything to do with Culverton whisky. It was like
that game where you tried to match advertising slogans with the
right products. The slogans were familiar enough, but he was
never sure which belonged with what, and very few other people
were either.

But everybody here was all wrapped up in it. You'd have
thought they were the UN, trying to work out something that
would persuade the Russians to lay off. He looked at Hilda
Wood. She was making notes on a pad, writing in little bursts
as fast as she could, her fingers white where they gripped the
pencil, her eyes glistening.

"Look," she said. "Look. Why don't we give him a name?
The Earl of Culverton, or something, famous British sportsman.
He always carries his arm in a sling. You know. Everybody
thinks anything is swank if it's British. And you have to have
whisky swank, or people just think of a quick one at the moment."

"But where's your *commercial*?" the man with the
voice asked. "I don't see how you're going to
get out of any of that."

"That's too long," Tony said. "Let's get on with it." He spoke from the end of the table. "I'm interested. 'Lord Culverton, British sportsman, resident of Culverton, home of the famous Culverton family—that's too long.'"

"Is there any such family as Culverton in the company?" the youngish man inquired. "I mean, if there is, and we don't start giving them titles, when maybe lots of people know 'em from Astoria from way back—"

"There isn't any Culverton," Tony said. "Let's get on with it." He stopped listening. He looked at the model of a schooner on the mantel over the artificial fireplace at the side of the room. He wondered what a fireplace was doing here anyway, especially an artificial one. It was black marble with an opening for logs, but there were no logs in it; there was nothing in it at all. Nothing on the mantel except the ship model, which didn't seem to belong in the room either, or anywhere else except in somebody's house. Then he saw that there was a plaque under the model and he shifted in his chair and squinted until he could read some of what it said. Something about the first ship built by the Line in eighteen hundred and something. He guessed that must have been a client of the agency, probably a very important one, so that he bet they had built that whole fireplace and mantel just to show off the ship model.

He had always liked boats. He and another fellow had sailed a little Beetle one summer, and they had sailed all over the Sound in it. But what he'd really like was something with more power that could really take you places. He'd have a boat some day, and he and Libby would go down to Florida in the winter and up to Nantucket in the summer. He was sure Libby liked boats. It was funny that he didn't know she loved the water, so the chances were she liked boats. "Does it strike you, Jim?"

Her voice almost made him jump, but he had

longer anything but a very simple and direct proposition.

He looked a little, as though he had been looking at them very carefully, how to give a slow, thoughtful answer, in such general terms that no one could be sure he had any notion what was going on.

"Well," he said. "Well, I'm pretty new at this, so I don't know much of a judge." He smiled around at all of them. "It seems pretty good to me."

The men all smiled back at him, and Hallie gave him a friendly wink, but his father didn't look at him.

"Well, I guess that's it," he said, and his voice sounded exactly the way it did at home. "Thanks, everybody."

On the train going home that night, he scarcely spoke at all. He bought an evening paper and gave Jim the second half, and when he had finished the first half, he put his head back against the seat and went to sleep. Once his head jerked forward, and he opened his eyes angrily, as if someone had deliberately disturbed him, but in a minute he was asleep again. Just past Colfax, he sat up, looking a little refreshed, and began speaking as though he were continuing a conversation.

"If you'd rather be doing something else, Jim," he said, "I think you ought to tell me right now. I won't be hurt, you know. I want you to do what you want to do, and if it's not what I want, that's perfectly all right."

"What brought this on?"

Tony glanced at him quickly and then looked away. "You seem interested in what went on in that meeting room, but you weren't even listening."

"Sure I was, dad. The Earl of Culverton, famous sportsman, always wears his arm in a sling."

His father spoke as though he had not heard. "Maybe she's right. She doesn't think you're fitted for the jewelry business, and maybe you aren't. There's nothing wrong with my father wanting me to go into the jewelry business."

"I was so excited when I was called to go to the hospital. I thought, 'I'm going to see something fine. I thought that seeing a doctor was exciting.'"

"I've picked the right word. His father smiled and said, 'That's the way it always is. After it's over you may be worn out, and you won't know what it's all about and whether it's really of any importance at all. but while it's going on, it's the most important thing in the world. And when you finally get what you're doing, it's not the right word or gimmick or whatever, I don't know, there's nothing like it.' He gave a little laugh. 'Half the time I think it's a hell of a phony business for a man to devote his life to, and I wish I were doing something more worth while, but the other half I know I wouldn't really want to do anything else. This thing of moulding public taste—you've got to be an artist and a psychologist and a mesmerist and I don't know what else. If you do a good job, it gives you a sense of power.'"

He stopped and looked at Jim. "I didn't mean to make a speech,"

"That's okay," Jim said. He was embarrassed. He had never heard his father talk like that. He had never heard him really overboard about anything at all before. It was the second unfamiliar side of him Jim had seen that day, first at the meeting and now this. At the meeting he had admired his father's toughness, the way he had sparked the group and got them working at hot pitch, but this was something else. How could anybody get sentimental about that stuff? A sense of pride? He didn't think he had ever heard such borscht, and he wished his father hadn't said it.

He told Libby about it that night. Not the words—he could not have brought himself to repeat them—but the sense of it.

"You should have seen that meeting," he told her. "The whole place was, knocking themselves out over that man with a quietness as if he were—I don't know—God or something. They had to figure how to put him over to the congregation. It was the sort of inspired them. He was really hot. I think

of course, but he didn't want to say

anything more.

They were sitting on a blanket on the beach. The sun was out and cool, and he thought how different it was from the artificial coolness of the office or the Whitney. Other groups dotted the beach, and a few people were in the water, though it was not really warm enough now that the summer was gone down. One group had a fire and was cooking hot dogs and singing. I could stay here the rest of my life, Jim thought, and be just like this.

"That's why he's successful," Libby answered him. "Because he feels that way about it."

"Maybe."

The subject was losing interest for him now that he had said what he wanted to say. He lay down on his stomach, his chin propped on his hand, and looked at Libby, and wondered if he would ever get tired of looking at her. She had on a sleeveless sweater and sandals on her bare feet. Whatever she wore was just exactly the right thing for her, and you wished she would wear anything else, but then the next time you saw her you would have on something altogether different, and you'd feel the same way about that.

"Let's get married," he said.

She smiled. "Right this minute?" She had the prettiest smile he'd ever seen. Like seed pearls, and he couldn't help but think it was corny.

"No," he said, "why not?"

"Well," She began enumerating on her fingers. "First, we haven't had a blood test. Second, we can't get a license until we do. Third, you aren't twenty-one so you'd have to get your parent's consent and your mother wouldn't give it. Maybe that's first."

"What do you mean, my mother wouldn't give it?"

"Now?"

"She doesn't like you," Libby said. "I don't know why. I don't know why she doesn't like you."

"I don't have any reason. She hardly sees me. You're always nice to her and everything. If she didn't like you, she'd tell me. I don't know her. She'd have a little talk with me. I'd be sort of kid about it, but she'd tell me."

"Not with this, she wouldn't. I'm sure she wouldn't. She'd be afraid for that."

"You sound as if it's you who don't like her."

Libby clasped her arms around her knees and looked down at her hand. "She scares me a little."

"Mom?" he hooted. "Go on!"

"Well, she does. She's so clever and I don't know how to talk to her. My mother is—well, you know, just a mother, but she's—" She laughed suddenly. "I'm not making any sense."

He grinned at her and pulled her down beside him. "No sense?" But he thought he knew what she meant about his mother. Mrs. Gorman was a little on the fat side and she didn't do anything about her hair. When she talked to Libby or Libby's friends, she changed her voice as if they were strange children or foreigners who had to be spoken to carefully, and slowly so they would understand. She called them all "darling" even if she had never seen them before.

"You're always kidding about getting married," Libby said. "I wish you wouldn't. It might be bad luck."

He stared at her instead of answering. Her lips tasted salty, and for some reason he thought of Hallie Breed and wondered what she would taste like. If you kissed a woman like Hallie, you wouldn't have to let her go so soon; she wouldn't expect you to. He thought, that was a crazy thing to be thinking about while kissing Libby.

"It's all right," he said, without knowing exactly what he was saying.

her father said, "You're home early," and waited for him to explain. When he didn't, she added, "Did you work in the study, and Aunt Marcia went to a party with Ann and Bill. She's never been to one and she's always been dying to go."

"I'll bet they appreciated having a chaperone," Jim said. Lex grinned. "No one in this world ever thought of me as a chaperone."

"What's the difference anyway," Zelda said, "at a movie? Drive-ins aren't just movies," Jim said, trying to get away from her. "They're passion pits."

Zelda wrinkled her nose and said, "Don't be disgusting. I'm laughing."

Jim shrugged. "I didn't make it up. Everybody calls them that." He sat down. "How's the job coming?" he asked Lex. "I don't know. I have to wait until the F.B.I. decide whether I'm good enough to work for the government. Until they decide nothing happens."

"Someone from the F.B.I. is coming around tomorrow morning to see me," Zelda said. "We've been wondering whether he asked tomorrow because he knew Lex wouldn't be here, and Aunt Marcia are going to the races."

"Sure he knows. They know everything," Lex said. "Do you read the comics? They probably have thought-microscopes concealed in every room."

"Do you read the comics?" Jim asked him curiously. "Sure. Ordinary reading's no good any more, in a world of intrigue beyond anything E. Phillips Oppenheim dreamed up. If you want to forget your troubles now, you go in for space ships and death rays and heroes who make themselves invisible."

"Who's E. Phillips Oppenheim?"

Jim looked at Zelda. "Is he illiterate, or just plain stupid?"

"I haven't been around to the office yet, have they?" she means the F.B.I.," Jim said to Lex. "You can concentrate if you want to keep up with her. Most of us are all listening in on thought-microphones too. I'll go and patted her cheek. "No, mom, *they* haven't been to the office, so far as I know."

His mother ignored him. She spoke to Lex. "He and I have built up the fiction that I'm a drivelling idiot," she said. "Whenever their male ego is tottering a little, they always fall back on that."

"No one," Lex said, "ever took you for an idiot, Zel."

She looked at him and smiled. "No?"

Sometimes you were reminded that they had known each other for years, since Jim's mother was younger than Jim now, long before Lex had married Marcia. But if you think of them as they might have been then, you couldn't help but feel that it had all been different then, anyhow. Their war had been back of them instead of ahead of them, and as far as they knew there was never going to be another one. If they were to make plans, they could make them, and be pretty sure they would go through.

"You're quiet, Jim," his mother said. "Is anything wrong?" He shook his head. She was always asking him if anything was wrong. Sometimes he thought she was hoping there was something he would have to tell her about so she could comfort him. She would have liked him to tell her everything, the way he had when he was a little boy, and she knew he wouldn't do that now.

"You're probably tired," Lex said. "Work always makes me tired. How did it go anyhow, Jim?"

"You mustn't ask him," Zelda said. "You mustn't ask him about very personal matter."

Jim said, "I'm not."

"You're not?" Lex said. "It's so obvious. It's like she is keeping everything to yourself. Isn't it? You're so interested in what happened your first day at your father's office? Do you think you'll lose caste, or something, if you tell us?"

"But I did tell you. I pasted ads in a scrapbook and I was at Whitney's and I sat in on a meeting about a commercial for Culverton's whisky. What more do you want to say?"

"You knew, of course. He knew she would love it if he told her what he had been thinking while he pasted the ads, and what he had felt while he was at the meeting. She'd have loved to hear about the martini at Whitney's and why he ordered it, and why he had wished he were at a hamburger stand instead, and about how he had made his father think he got a kick out of the man with the sling and about Hallie Breed. She'd have put it all up if he could have told her, but you couldn't tell your mother any of that.

"You couldn't let anybody know you that well, when it came down to it. If he hadn't told Libby so much, it would have been a secret too. She'd have thought his father's office was the dream of his life, and there wouldn't have been any argument. As it was, as people knew what you were really thinking and feeling, they tried to make you think and feel something else.

"Leave him alone, Zel," Lex said. "Let's all have a drink and take the orders."

Jim stood up. "I'll get them. I just want a coke myself. How about you two?"

"I wanted a scotch highball. Jim's mother said she'd have one too. She took his hand and pulled him down to her. "I'll have it your own way," she said, and kissed his cheek. "You're an atomic secret, if you want to, and I'll never ask you another question."

She kissed her too. "Sure you will, mom," he said.

to have a car of his own, and he knew it was his

that any garage mechanic ever could make. If he was a mechanic, everybody would think there was something wrong with him.

Libby wouldn't like it either, whatever she said. Oh, she was only the beginning and in a couple of years he would be a big shot, a designer of cars, or something, the way he had suggested, that would be fine. But he knew it wouldn't be like that. He was just a guy who was good with his hands. If he had been Nat Tillson's son, that would have been all right. But he was Tony Halliday's son, the son of a big advertising man, a Phi Beta, and he was damn lucky that his father had a business of his own where he could push Jim ahead as far as he wanted to. All he had to do was act alert and intelligent, say the right things and ask the right questions, and he was okay. He'd got through plenty of courses in college like that, and the professor hadn't been his father.

Maybe if he could have said all this to Libby she'd have understood, but he couldn't. When he tried to talk about his father or his mother it just sounded as if he didn't care about anything but making a quick buck. He'd have been willing to go to work and to work his way up to something somewhere else, but he knew he had what it took. Otherwise he'd be a damn fool, losing his brains out and getting nothing for it. Hell, you only lived once, and two or three years came off in the time it took to get on again with.

The drinks were finished, and he took them out himself. He went to the bar and then went in again to phone Libby. He had a can of coke with him. It was late, and her father was home, but he couldn't help that. He had to tell her that he was always blowing his top about something, but it wasn't this, it would be something else.

He started to dial the number, but then he heard

alarm. "What's the matter?" he asked. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," she said. "I'm just a little tired." "Okay."

"Where are Bill and Aunt Marcia?"

"Bill's home. She's out on the terrace."

"You're eating you? You look like hell."

"Thanks." She started to climb the stairs, and he waited.

"The door of her room close so he could telephone, but in

the front seat. She wasn't a bad-looking kid when she first

met him, but you'd never have known it now.

"I'll keep, won't it?" he said. "I want to make a phone call."

"Right now?"

"I can't call anybody much later, can I? It's almost twelve

o'clock." But her face looked funny, as if she were going to cry.

"Oh, all right, if it's so important. Let's have it."

Her voice got tight. "Not here. I don't want anybody to hear."

"Come on out and sit in the car."

Bill was curious now. What kind of a jam was she in? He

wondered, as he followed her outside. A jam with Bill? He

didn't think so. Not that way, anyhow. He didn't think Bill

would have the nerve. He wouldn't have had when he was

seven. For one thing, he'd have been scared of not knowing

her. Anyway, Ann wouldn't talk to him about that; she'd

be too proud she knew. Now that he thought of it, what would

she tell him about? They didn't fight much any more, but

they weren't exactly on intimate terms. She was a kid just out

of high school, a girl. He was fond of her, but their interests

were just the same at all.

He went the way to the garage and got into the front of the

ear, leaving the door open for him to come in and begin,

"All right, let's go," he said. "I haven't got all night."

She stirred and put her head down. "There's a man coming from the F.B.I. tomorrow to ask mother questions."

"I know that. What of it?"

"I'm scared of what he might ask her. I thought if I could see him first and tell him not to say— But I don't think that's a good idea either, because he may not even—"

"Whoa!" Jim said. "You're not making sense, kid. Start over. What could anybody ask mom that you have to be scared about?"

"Mrs. Dellett. He asked somebody else about her and I know he's going to ask mother too."

"Who the heck is—? Oh, you mean that woman who used to work for dad. What's she got to do with anything? It's not like they want to know about, not—"

"I know, and I don't understand what she's got to do with it, but that's not the point." She stopped, and then went on again in a low voice. "She was up here once when mother and dad had a party. You were at camp. Joan's brother walked me home from their house after supper, and when he left, I went around in back so I wouldn't have to meet all the company." She stopped again, and Jim wanted to tell her for pure's sake to get on with it, but he kept quiet. "Dad and Mrs. Dellett were there. They didn't see me. They were standing sort of under the back steps, necking."

Jim took a deep breath. "They probably had a few drinks. It doesn't mean anything. People do those things sometimes when they've had a few drinks."

She didn't answer that. "I sort of forgot about it. I haven't thought of it in a long time. But if that man starts asking questions—I don't know—mother might find out." She looked at him. "I thought you could help me figure some way to stop

"Why didn't you tell me before? When it happened?"

the
the Rapaho Day Camp was an old one
like that, Ann thought, he should never be
around kids, but he was around them all the time. In the
er taught physical ed at the junior high school. He didn't
in mind being called the Rat, though. Maybe he didn't
about it.

"I don't see how he can get away with some of the things
said. "The awful food—"

"It's starchy, so it fills them up, and when mama asks
they had for lunch they don't remember. Kids don't, as long as
they're filled up. On visiting days we'll have chicken
chocolate sauce on the ice-cream, and the mamas will think
how we eat every day. Or pretend to themselves to think

The bus lurched over a bump in the road, and there were
several minutes of confusion as the children who were standing
all against each other and some of them screamed as if they
had been killed and others giggled insanely. Ann tried to do
what she could, but nobody paid much attention to her. It was
a gift, she thought, watching Wilma restore order with a few
words and some dett handwork among the fallen ranks.

"Come on, everybody, let's sing!" Wilma shouted. "Hail
cheers for Rapaho.' You old campers make it loud and clear so
the new ones can learn the words. All ready?" She held up her
hand and then sliced it downward as she gave them the pitch
of the opening bar, and when they were singing deafeningly
and almost tunelessly she moved back to Ann. "That'll keep
them for a while. 'Dear old Rapaho, best camp in the valley
still!'"

Ann grinned. "Someone told me this is your fourth year."
"Sure. Group heads like me get paid more than at any other
everyday camps around here. The Rat's a shrewd operator. He
gets the best Senior Councilors he can, so when mama asks me
who's going to be in charge of her little angel, he says
Doncourt, science teacher at the swanky Elmwood school.

And besides, it's open six days a week, instead of some of the others, and it stays open until the end of the month instead of the third week, so for only a little more money you can get rid of her brat much longer, and that makes it the best damn camp in the whole county of Westchester.

Wilma said all this very fast, speaking out of the side of her mouth in a low voice so the kids wouldn't hear, though she knew they were listening anyhow. Ann laughed. "I don't get it," she said. "Hardly anything."

"He doesn't have to pay you. You're glad to get the experience in such a fine camp, because everybody knows once you've worked at Rapaho you can get a job at any camp."

The bus pulled into the camp grounds. It was a beautiful spot, a former farm, with a fine view of the Westchester hills. There were swings and sand boxes for the smaller children, a field that could be transformed from a volley ball court to a basketball court to an archery range, and an outdoor swimming pool. The hot lunches were served in a long, low, jerry-built building called "The Lodge," which also had rooms for rainy day play. It was always stiflingly hot in The Lodge. On fair days, the windows were open down on the low roof, and other days the windows had to be closed or it would rain in. If anyone complained about the heat or about anything else at Rapaho, Mr. Ratman would smile and say, "We're leading the simple life, you know. It does seem good to get back to the simple life now and then."

He came out to the road now to meet the busses as they arrived and say good morning to all the children and counselors. He was short, chunky, middle-aged, with a mane of thick, graying and-salt hair and skin burned almost black by the sun. He wore a white tee shirt, khaki shorts and blue sneakers. "Good morning, all!" he shouted cheerfully, smiling and showing a large number of big, white teeth. "This is going to be a fine day at Rapaho. Have fun."

"Good morning, Chief," the children said. They filed out of the bus.

part of the day. The boys were sitting under the trees with their group, waiting for the day's activities." But there were only three trees in the camp grounds. If a child wanted to be a bum sport and get out of the blazing sun during the course of a game, he could sit under one of them.

As soon as everyone was on the field, Mr. Ratman disappeared. At intervals during the day he would be seen standing on a small rise of ground, from which he could survey the whole camp. Sometimes he was accompanied by Mrs. Ratman, the camp mother, a thin, earnest-looking woman who taught first grade in the winter. She was the only person in the camp, except for the cook, who did not wear shorts. Her cotton dresses always looked as if they needed ironing.

Sometimes they would just stand there watching silently for a minute or two, and sometimes Mr. Ratman would yell in an amazingly carrying voice, "Is everybody happy?" and wait until he was answered with a more or less unified, "Yes!"

"What's the point of that, anyhow?" Ann asked Wilma. "They're not going to say no, even if they want to."

Wilma shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe he's got a conscience after all, and that saves it."

They were sitting in one of the three spots of shade in their bathing suits, waiting for the girls in their group to get ready for swimming. The boys were playing baseball under the supervision of Tod Henderson, a 3-letter man who had graduated from high school with Ann with a straight C average and won a scholarship to a big midwestern college. He settled arguments in the game by saying, "All right, now, shut up, you guys, and play ball."

Several boys who were not in the game hung around aimlessly, or swung bats where he might see them, or threw stones in the grass in the hot sun and stared dismally at the sky. Every once in a while one of them would yell, "Play ball."

Too late. The boys had already gone in. Ann would answer

him. "I'll let them in," he said. "He doesn't want to let them in. It's too much trouble to show them the game. If he insists on his letting them in, it'll only be worse for them because he'll make them miserable, and encourage the other kids to make them miserable. He thinks they might as well be unenlightened, anyway, because what use to humanity is it if he's no good at baseball by the time he's eight years old."

Ann lay back on the grass. It felt prickly against her skin, only a small portion of which was covered by her two-piece bathing suit. She was hot, even in the shade, but she would not have minded being even hotter now, because the more uncomfortable she was the better it would feel in a few minutes, when she got into the pool. All she could really think of was how good it would be in the water, icy at first against her hot body, and then something, delicious. Everything else seemed remote, her fight last night with Bill; the FBI man who was coming back again tonight and wanted to speak to her this time; even Wilma, sitting beside her, talking in that bitter way that was somehow amusing and flattering. She must have been twenty-seven or -eight, but she talked to Ann as though they were the same age.

"I wish they'd hurry," Ann said, barely breathing it. "If they don't get into the water soon, I'll die."

"Here come the little darlings now."

Ann sat up and watched the small girls running toward her from The Lodge, squeaking and giggling. They were all small and shapes, some so skinny that they looked like chickens, with their ribs and breast bones showing through the skin, some round as balloons, their stomachs straining to burst through their white bathing-suits.

A little square, blond pigtailed one came and planted her feet in front of Ann. "I'm going to ask her," she said over her shoulder to someone behind her, and then addressed Ann. "Listen,

television, when the men were shot, they were shot and
they were shot. "Oh, please, not."

"The little girl said to the child behind her. She
said to Ann. "I told her. They go to the hospital, don't
get the bullet holes fixed up so they can do it again."

For a minute Ann thought she was going to laugh, and then
she knew that she did not feel like laughing at all; it was
though she might cry to think of anyone's being that ignorant
and innocent. She reached out and took the little girl's hand
and drew her a bit closer.

"The men don't really get hit by bullets at all," she said softly.
"The guns don't have any bullets in them. They just make
noise as if they did, and the men fall down and pretend to be

The child stared at her. "Are you sure?"

Ann nodded. "Yep. Ask your mother."

"Okay, I will."

She pulled her hand away and began running toward the pool.
All the other girls followed. "Take it easy, now," Wilma
called. "Nobody gets even so much as a toe wet until Ann says
it's there. You did good," she said to Ann. "She won't have
to ask her mother, assuming she could find her to ask her any-

"Do you know her mother?"

"No. I'm just talking generally. Maybe that one's mother
is hiding from her, but half of them are."

"Why do they have children, then?"

Wilma shrugged. "I used to ask my mother that all the time."

The pool lay ahead of them, the blue water lapping gently
against the sides. Ann broke away from Wilma and plunged in.
After a few strokes and then wriggled over to her back and
rested, letting the coolness sink into her bones. For a moment
the world felt lovely, and it did not matter that Bill was
a lifeguard at the Fair Oaks Beach Club when he was
a job here at Rapaho, and it was not important.

her back, and she went to the back porch, and she

was not there when the Rat came. The Rat was not there when the boys were shot full of holes on television. The Rat went to the hospital every morning for repairs. The Rat went back to her stomach and swam to the shallow end of the pool, where the children were lined up with Wilma and the one else who must have been the new swimming coach. The Rat had hired for the summer had been drafted. That was the job Bill could have had, only he hadn't wanted

"I spent enough time at those camps when I was a little kid," he had said. "I'm fed up with them."

"But we could be together."

"We could not. I'd have to be at the pool all day, teaching those dumb kids how to dog paddle. I want a good job."

"All right, then, if you feel that way. Go to Farroaks and show off your manly build to all those snooty girls, if that's what you want. Maybe I won't be here when you come around for a date, though."

"Yeah? Maybe I won't come around."

It had been a stupid fight, different from any they had had before, almost as if they had wanted to quarrel and were trying to work it up. Maybe because it had been a hot night.

The new swimming coach was holding a little girl around the middle in the water, while she flapped her arms and legs. She was the others splashed near Wilma, and a few of the better swimmers came paddling out toward Ann and turned back with her.

"This is Gerhardt Weber," Wilma said. "My assistant, Ann."

"He's an Austrian from Austria," one of the little girls said. Another one shrieked, "He is not! He's a refugee."

"He's Gerhardt," Ann said.

"He smiled. 'I would like you to call me Gerry.'"

He had only a faint accent, more a preciseness of speech than

any accent at all. Ann thought that he was a foreigner. He turned
his head and looked at her. He was a young man, about twenty, with
dark hair and a broad forehead. He had a swimmer's powerful
build, but otherwise he did not look strong and his arms were
slender.

"You must have come from Austria a long time ago," Ann
said. "The way you speak English."

"No, only three months." He walked along slowly with her.
He was teaching to swim, speaking to her softly. "Don't
worry, now. So. So. That's good. That's fine." He smiled at
her. "My village was in the American zone. For all these
years I hear the GI's speak and I speak to them, and that is how
I learn English."

Wilma called to her sharply. "Ann, I need you. I can't handle
all these kids alone, you know."

"I'm sorry." Ann swam over to her through the shallow water.
"What do you want me to do?"

"Take some of them off my hands, that's all, instead of hanging
around with the first man you see."

Ann got red with anger. "What do you mean? I was
being polite. I don't think I said a dozen words to him. You
don't need to talk as if—"

"Forget it," Wilma broke in. Then she smiled and put her
hand lightly on Ann's arm. "I just want you to be careful, you
attractive girl like you."

Ann was still angry, yet at the same time flattered. This wasn't
really any of Wilma's business, unless Ann neglected her work
with the kids. Anyhow she hadn't said much more to Gerhart
than courtesy required. He didn't look or act much like a
foreigner, that was for sure. Still she was rather pleased that Wilma
thought she was so attractive that any fellow would be a danger.
No one had ever thought that before, even her mother.

"I can take care of myself," she said, but without heat. "If
anybody's interested in him, I assure you. He's much too old for me."

and he was a good swimmer. He was a good swimmer. He was a good swimmer.

"That's what Wilma said," Wilma said. "That."

"What do you mean?"

Ann stepped in back of a little girl who was splashing water near her, aiming the water with demoniac precision at the mouths that opened to protest. Wilma picked her up by the back of the bathing suit and held her in the air as easily as if she had been a frog, though she must have weighed seventy pounds.

"That's enough," she said. "Where shall I put you? Out in the pool where you can't bother anybody? Or is it safe to let you back in?"

The child gasped and squirmed. "Put me back!" she screamed. "I won't do it any more!"

Wilma released her, letting her fall against the water with a smack and then righting her before her head could go under. Then she hoisted herself up to the side of the pool and sat there watching Ann playing with the children.

"Come out and rest a minute," she called. "You can keep an eye on them from here."

Ann got up beside her. Further out, where it was deeper, Gerhardt worked patiently with the swimmers. "Not so fast with the arms. Easy. Smooth. Ah, so!"

"There's an earnest young man," Wilma said. "He'll make swimmers out of them all by the end of the summer, and the Rat will get the credit. My dear, it's the most wonderful thing. Every single solitary child learns how to swim." She drummed her heels in slow rhythm against the side of the pool. "So you're going steady. That's a horrid phrase. It used to mean the cop going with the cop on the corner. What's he like?"

Ann didn't know what to say. She felt on the defensive, though she could not have told why. "He's just a kid from school."

"How have you thought you were beyond that sort of thing?"

"Did she mean in age? Ann wondered, or some other way."

"What?" she asked, not knowing how else to put it.

"He's not the average bobby soxer who thinks the world is his oyster."

...and made a life, then some half-baked boy...
...where her terry-cloth jacket lay on the grass, and
...the watch in the pocket, and then blew the whistle that
...a cord around her neck. "All out!" she shouted. "All
...out!" She put her hand briefly against the back of
...back. "You're quite a girl, Ann. Don't get bogged down by
...mediocrity."

Ann felt warm with pleasure. She was not sure how Wilma
...knew so much about her, but that was how Wilma was. She
...knew a great deal about everything. From the first day of camp
...last week, she had talked to Ann about all sorts of things in that
...sort of sharp, cynical way she had that got right to the heart of
...whatever it was, and apparently she had liked Ann's comments
...though Ann could not remember that she had ever said anything
...particularly brilliant. Still, some people could understand what
...others were really like even if you couldn't always put things exactly
...the way you felt them.

"I'll try not to," she said to Wilma, and smiled.

Lunch was outside that day because it was the cook's day. Each
...group had its own charcoal fire, and the councilors made
...hot dogs and marshmallows for the children, and passed out
...potatoes and ice cream cups and containers of milk. When the
...children were served, the councilors ate their own lunch, punctuated
...by cries for help from someone whose tomato had squished
...all over the front of him, whose hot dog had been filched from
...his paper plate when his back was turned, or whose ice cream
...had slithered into the dirt.

"Ye gods!" Wilma said, leaning against a tree and drinking
...coffee from a paper cup. "How do we stand this every week?
...The next brat that wails my name, I swear I'm going to pound
...his head with a burnt wurst."

The swimming instructor had been helping with the boys.
...He stood under the tree now between Ann and Wilma, looking
...over his swimming trunks and the first flush of summer

"But you don't mean that," he said to Wilma, smiling. "You love them."

She looked at him briefly, gulped her coffee, and crushed it in her hand. "I feel sorry for them," she said, tossing the cup in the fire. "Sorry as hell, that's all."

"But why?" he asked, still smiling. "Is not childhood the happiest time of life?"

"Hal!" Wilma said.

She and Ann herded the children into the Lodge, where rows of army cots stood ready for the afternoon rest period. It was Wilma's day to stay and see that everyone rested. "The Comforters' Oasis," she called this hour. Ann, who had the time to leave the Lodge and wandered outside, almost as hot as she had been before her swim, wondering whether she had the energy to get into her suit again for another dip.

She decided against it. Gerhardt was still under the tree, sitting down now and smoking a pipe. She went over and joined him, and when he saw her his face lit up and he sprang to his feet. "I was lonely," she thought. She could imagine nothing lonelier than being in a strange country, where even the way people talked was unfamiliar, no matter how well you might know the language.

"Miss Halliday," he said.

She grinned at him. "Sit down, Gerry. Nobody's that polite here. And nobody calls me Miss Halliday, either."

"Thank you," he said gravely. "Thank you for telling me, Ann." He sat down again and she sprawled beside him on the cot, her back against the tree. "I will appreciate if you will tell me anything I do that is not as Americans do. I wish not to seem

stupid," she said.

He smiled. "Okay."

"That's nice," she thought. She felt comfortable with him.

He did not seem to be very old, either. He was a foreigner, but he seemed younger, and that was because he was a foreigner and there were many things, American things, that she knew and he didn't. "Are you here with your parents?" she asked him.

He shook his head. "I have a sister who is married and lives in this town. It is with her I stay. In the winter I hope I will get a position as a swimming instructor in a boy's school that Mr. Katman knows of. I am a very good swimmer," he said, but not in a conceited way at all, Ann thought, just as he'd state a fact, "and I have patience for teaching."

"Yes, I saw you with the kids," she said. "I thought you were wonderful."

"You did?" he said eagerly. "I am glad, because I try very hard. Also, I like children—kids—very much."

"So do I. I may go into teaching myself."

Such a thing had never occurred to her until that moment. She had thought only vaguely of what she might do after college. In the back of her mind had been the idea that it was not very important, really, because there probably would be only a small time between graduation and marriage. She would have to fill that lapse, of course, and it was a good idea to know how to do something in case you had to work for a while after you were married, but you weren't going to make it a career of anything, if you had a talent, or something you were burning to do, it was different, but Ann wasn't in that class and she didn't know anyone else who was. They all just wanted to get married. It was all right to take a job and to keep it at first if you had to, because sometimes you wouldn't be able to get married at all, or you helped out like that, or anyhow you wouldn't be able to live the way you wanted to live. But you planned to give it up and start having kids as soon as you could.

Teaching wouldn't be a bad thing to do along with being married, because the hours were so good, but this was not what Ann most forcibly now that she really thought about it.

Teacher. She was a science teacher, but she was certainly a person who was attractive, vital person. And she wasn't even married. That was the thing. You could be a teacher in your late twenties, even if you weren't married you didn't have to be a dried-up old maid. You could be like Wilma.

"I believe you would make a fine teacher," Gerhardt said. "The children would listen to you because they would love you, just as that in just the short while I have watched."

Ann laughed. "They don't listen to me much. It's Wilma who can really manage them. She's wonderful with them."

"She is older. She understands better what makes them—tick."

"Yes, that's right. Tick."

"Yes. But you will learn, and do even better, I think."

"Better than Wilma?" Ann shook her head and said again. "She's wonderful. If I could do half as well, I'd think I was all right."

Gerhardt did not answer. He puffed on his pipe and glanced at Ann and then away again. There was a silence which ordinarily would have embarrassed her. She would have felt she had to fill it, or appear stupid and a bore. But she did not feel that way now. It seemed to her that Gerhardt was thinking, and that he wanted the silence, and she found it comfortable.

"Do you live near?" he asked her finally.

"About six miles from here."

"With your family?"

"Yes, my parents and my brother, Jim. He's twenty."

"You are still in school?"

"I just finished high school. In the Fall, I'm going to Radcliffe College. That's in Cambridge, Massachusetts." She looked at him and smiled. "I play tennis and ride horseback and I love to dance, and I like to watch almost any sport, especially football. My favorite actor is Marlon Brando and my favorite actress is"

Katherine. "I didn't know you were so good at kidding. I didn't know you were so good at kidding. But my father, when he was looking at her with a little frown, she was waiting for a minute, and she felt sort of peculiar. Maybe he didn't understand that kind of kidding. Maybe he didn't understand that she was talking about.

"I am sorry," he said then. "I ask too many questions. I am really that I am interested to know about you, since I think we are to be friends."

She felt ashamed, as though she had been baiting a child. It had been the mildest kind of teasing.

"You weren't asking too many questions," she said. "I wasn't trying to be funny." She paused and then added, "I guess Americans are always trying to be funny."

The frown faded. "You say that as if you apologize. Do you apologize for trying to be funny. It is a good thing. I think the world that is not funny at all. There would be no trouble if everybody laughed."

"That's putting it backwards, isn't it? If there were no trouble, everybody would laugh."

"I think not. The laughter comes from inside. When it is inside, nothing from outside will put it there. When it is, nothing can take it altogether away."

Neither of them heard the blowing of the whistle that announced the end of rest hour. Ann saw Wilma coming across the grass from the Lodge, but it did not really register. She had never talked like this with anyone before. It made her strange, sort of stirred up, as though there were a lot of things she wanted to say but she didn't know exactly what they were. When Wilma spoke, she jumped.

"Didn't you hear the whistle?" Wilma asked. "You've got to go to do, you know. Save the socializing for after hours." Gerhardt had leaped to his feet as she began to speak. "I'm doing," he said. "I talk so much and so loud we don't hear the whistle." He smiled. "That is always my great trouble."

once. She was bored all right, but she wasn't interested and she wasn't going to let her mother know that. She might have come out from that interest in her mother's conversation about Gerry, and it would be a good idea to keep out of it. It wasn't as if she was really interested in him anyhow. She said Bill.

But when she thought of Bill, all of a sudden it was like the coming of someone she had known a long time ago and could remember very well.

Everybody was home for dinner except Jim. Ann tried to go to the table in shorts, but they wouldn't let her. You'd think you could be comfortable in your own home. She said so, but it wasn't any use. They didn't see why she couldn't be just as comfortable in a sleeveless dress. There was no sense arguing that a dress came down around your legs. At breakfast and lunch it might be all right, but this was dinner, they said, and Lex was there and she wasn't a child any more. So she put on the dress and pulled it up above her knees under the table. "Where's Jim?" her father asked.

"I don't know," her mother said. "He just told me he was staying in town for dinner. I'm not allowed to ask him any questions. Didn't he tell you where he was going?"

"No. He left word with my secretary that he wouldn't be taking the train with me, that's all."

He started to say something else, and then he didn't. It was because Marcia and Lex were there, Ann thought. Up to a point, everything was discussed in front of them, but there was a line somewhere. Ann could never tell exactly where. She was sure her mother told Marcia everything anyhow, when they were alone, and maybe her father did the same with Lex, though men were different that way. But somehow they both seemed to know everything that was going on, sooner or later, and Ann didn't like it very much. After all, Lex wasn't in the family any more, and Aunt Marcia hadn't been around for a few years and didn't

was
wondered how she would have acted if she had
been. She might have stayed away from the house as
possible, but she didn't think she'd have stayed away from
body she liked, the way Jim was staying away from Lex.
"How was camp today?" her mother asked her, choosing a
safe topic while Rena was in the room.

"Okay," she said. "Hot, but okay." That didn't seem
enough to say, so she added, "We have a new swimming
instructor, Gerhardt Weber. He's Austrian. He's only been here three
months."

"What's he like?" Marcia asked. She always wanted to know
what men were like.

"Oh, he's not too bad. I thought he was about twenty-eight at
first, but he's only twenty-four. He looks older, but he acts
young in some ways, almost innocent."

She stopped. She had not meant to say that much, only to
enter into the conversation, the way her mother was always
telling her to do. If they kidded her about Gerry now, tried to
make something of it, she'd have only herself to blame. But
nobody said anything except Marcia. Nobody else seemed to be
listening.

"Don't let that fool you," Marcia said. "There are no innocent
European men."

She and Wilma ought to get together, Ann thought.

They began talking about Jim again, as soon as Rena had gone,
but nobody really came out and said anything. They just
talked around it, without admitting that there was actually
something peculiar in the way Jim was behaving.

"I'll bet he has another girl," Lex said. "No boy his age can
stick to one girl this long. When we were kids we didn't
care, but these days it's something to be ashamed of if you do."

Ann stopped listening. They weren't going to get anywhere
because they didn't know what was at the bottom of everything.
She knew, or thought she did, and still she couldn't say

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was nervous about the F.B.I. man. Nobody had the right to be questioned at all, and they didn't see what she could do that would be any help. "I suppose they want to get every impression of me, even a kid's," Lex had said, and laughed. "But get through this, you can all assume that I must be a pretty remarkable fellow."

"We know that now," Marcia had said, in the same sarcastic tone that Ann so disliked when her mother used it. "What they're looking for, I think, is someone safely unremarkable."

It was certainly true that there was nothing much Ann could tell anyone about Lex, but she didn't think they were going to ask her about it. She was sure she would be questioned about Mrs. Dellett, the way Mrs. Thayer had been. What Mrs. Dellett had to do with Lex's getting a job in the government, or how they suspected Ann might know something about her, she had no idea. All she knew was that she had this secret and the F.B.I. had a way of finding out secrets.

The man came promptly at eight o'clock, and he and Ann went upstairs to the study. It was Ann who closed the door. He sat at the desk and glanced at the papers her father had been working on.

"That 'man with the sling' ad has certainly caught on," he said. Ann said, "Yes," though she didn't know very much about it, just matches she'd heard at the table. She didn't pay much attention when they talked business.

The F.B.I. man took a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket and offered her one. She wondered whether he was testing her in some way, and whether it would be better to take it or not to take it, and decided it was better not. When he put the pack back in his pocket without taking one himself, she was sure she had made the right choice.

"You're Mr. Whitton's niece," he said, not as if it were

"I'm not his niece any more," she said. "He and my father divorced."

"That's right, too. I forgot. What happened there, anything?" He frowned, as if he thought it was too bad. "They both are nice folks."

"Yes," Ann said. "They just couldn't get along, I guess." He nodded. Then after a minute he said, "Still, here they're staying in the same house."

"Well, Aunt Marcia was coming for the summer anyhow, and Lex—well, you know, he's waiting to hear about the job and he's so hot in the city now. He and my father have always been friends, even before they met my mother and Aunt Marcia, so it's natural he'd stay here."

It was all going to be about Lex after all, and she needn't have worried. She was beginning to enjoy it now. Mr. Nye thought he was so clever, and that she wouldn't know what he was trying to get at, but of course she did know. She wasn't going to dope herself. You didn't get a 93% average in school by being a dope.

"Yes, I guess it is," Mr. Nye said. "A couple of people still seem to think, though, that he's here because of your aunt, that she still likes her."

"Well, they're perfectly friendly and all that. I mean they've agreed to split up because they couldn't get along, but they haven't hated each other or anything. That doesn't mean they're going to get together again."

She was pleased with herself. She thought she had done very well. For a minute she hadn't been able to see what importance it made to the government what Lex and Aunt Marcia did, but then she got the idea. If Lex didn't know his father was better than to get divorced and then a few years later

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"...the way they used to fight," she said. "Neither one of them could think of going back to it." "I needed. "They made a lot of noise, didn't they? It must have been embarrassing for you, the summer they stayed here. You were worried when they came again this year." "They don't fight now, if that's what you mean."

He looked out the window, and the sun glinted on his glasses. "What did they fight about anyhow?"

She said, "I don't remember," and it was true. She didn't remember, or maybe she had never known. She had heard the loud, angry voices and wondered who else could hear them; and maybe she had tried not to listen. If you didn't listen to things or think about them, sometimes you could feel as if they hadn't happened.

"Did they fight about money?" Mr. Nye asked her.

"I really don't remember."

Mr. Nye looked at her. "Well, was it about women? Maybe some particular woman?"

This was it, Ann thought. This was what he had been leading up to all the time. Mrs. Dellett. Some way she had something to do with Lex too, and Mr. Nye wanted to find out about her. He didn't care about Aunt Marcia and Lex or any of that. He just wanted to know about Mrs. Dellett.

"No," Ann said. "No, there was never anything about women."

Mr. Nye smiled again. "I thought you didn't remember." "I remember that."

"You're very fond of your uncle, aren't you?"

"I told you, he isn't my uncle any more. He's okay, though. I like him a lot."

"Could you say that most people like him?"

"I don't know." Apparently he was going to let it drop. He wanted to ask her about Mrs. Dellett after all. She smiled at him.

"I've been thinking about you a lot," he said. "I don't know if you think men like him as much as women do. I didn't say anything about women. I said everything."

Mr. Nye took a small notebook out of his pocket and wrote. "Thank you for your help, Miss Halliday. I'd like to see you another now for just a minute," he said, still writing. "Would you ask her if it would be convenient for her to come up here? Whether she'd rather I spoke to her somewhere downstairs." Ann went out into the hall and called her mother. Then she slipped into her room until she heard the door of the study close again, when she tiptoed out to where she could hear. She didn't know what Mr. Nye was going to ask her mother.

"Mrs. Halliday," she heard him say, "would you consider Mr. Whitton a ladies' man?"

She didn't hear the answer, because her father's footstep sounded on the stairs, and she had to hurry away from the door and pretend to be just coming out of her room.

"Hello, Baby," he said. When he was in a good mood, he called her mother "Babe," and her "Baby." She hadn't thought he'd be in a good mood now, on account of Jim. "Are they in there?" he asked, nodding toward the closed door of the study. "I wanted to work."

"Should I tell them? They could go in my room."

"Never mind. I don't have to do it right now. How about you and me taking a walk? Marcia and Lex have gone off somewhere."

"Okay," she said.

He looked surprised, as if he hadn't really expected her to go with him. She didn't care much about walking as a rule, except with Bill, but it seemed important to her to get him out of the house, away from where he might hear what was going on in the study. Mr. Nye was pursuing his idea about Lex and she was sure sooner or later, she was sure, he was going to come around

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to her. She knew that her father and mother were adults were concerned. Even when she was a child, she didn't really understand what was going on. Maybe it was because she didn't want to know. There was no sense trying to find out about things that would upset you when you knew them.

"Not coming tonight?" her father asked her, as they were walking along the road.

"No. We had a fight."

He didn't mind telling him, because she knew he wouldn't say the way her mother did or try to be funny about it or give her advice. Not usually, anyhow.

"You want to go to the movies with mother and me, then? It's not too late when the G-man's finished?" he asked her. "We got out of a bridge game because he was coming, and it's a chance in a million to go to an air-conditioned movie. I think we should go for the next two weeks."

This was one of the things she couldn't see. They were always dated up and always complaining about it, saying they wished they didn't have to go, that they could spend an evening home once in a while. Ann couldn't see why they made the dates in the first place if they felt like that.

"I've seen everything around," she said. "I'll just look at television."

She hadn't seen everything around, of course, but you couldn't go to the movies with your parents. Some of the kids might see you. Anyhow, Bill might weaken and call up later on.

They walked without talking for a while. She was sure her father was going to ask her what Mr. Nye had said, and she was preparing for it in her mind. Now that she thought about it, Mr. Nye hadn't really asked her anything much at all, and he certainly hadn't found out anything. Maybe he thought he could get the answers from her mother. Maybe he thought he knew all about Mrs. Dellett, and he'd ask her, and she

Ann didn't remember what her father and Mrs. Dellett had said to her the other that night. All she remembered was the kiss. That was the part she couldn't forget. But it wasn't all.

"What's the matter, Baby?" her father asked her. "You're cold, are you?" But the idea of her being cold on a night like this wasn't worth considering, and he went on without waiting for her answer. "I ought to do this more. Maybe I'd get a potbelly."

"You don't have any potbelly. You're skinny."

He laughed. "Your mother thinks I have."

She would, Ann thought. She'd tell him, too, making it all out of joke of it. When Ann was married, she was never going to be critical or sarcastic, and if her children wanted to make a potbelly for the table or her husband wanted to have a potbelly, she'd let them. She wouldn't make such a thing of it. Her father was okay. Sometimes she was a lot of fun to be with, and she could even be sort of understanding, but Ann could see where she might have trouble keeping a man in love with her, especially if there was a woman around who knew how to handle a man. Ann had seen Mrs. Dellett only a few times, but it was enough to tell she was a smooth one.

But she didn't want to think about that. She didn't want to think about it at all. "I've decided something, daddy," she said. "I'm going to be a teacher."

"Is that right?" The Glendons, who lived behind them, peered out of their car and he waved to them. "There goes the big boy in Westchester County, that Howard Glendon," he said. "I ought to be against the law to bore people. After all, it's just as bad as having your watch stolen—more so, really, because you can replace a watch, but not the hours a bore takes from you." He looked down at her. "If you're going to be a teacher, it's even more important. Sometimes people

Bill's serious. "How long have you been thinking about it?"

"A long time," she said, and believed it was so. "But there's a group at camp—Wilma Donscourt, you've heard me talk about her—was telling me a lot about it today." Ann tried to remember what Wilma had told her, but she couldn't exactly remember. Wilma was a science teacher at Emmett and she's really tops. I'd like to meet her some time. Anyhow, now I'm sort of decided."

He nodded, as if he thought it was all right. "Do you think you'll be good at it?"

"Well, I like kids and they seem to like me." She paused, trying to think of something to add to this. "Gerry Weber, the American I told you about, says I have a way with them."

"Oh? What does Bill say? Does he like the idea?"

It surprised her that her father would think Bill's opinion was important, that he would even mention it. Particularly because she herself hadn't once considered what Bill might say; it hadn't occurred to her at all. This was something vague and far away and Bill didn't seem to have any part in it. But as a matter of fact this whole day had been something that Bill had no part in, and when she thought about that she felt peculiar, almost though she were going to cry.

"He won't care," she told her father.

"Have you talked it over with mother?"

"Not yet," she said. "I wasn't sure until today."

For a few minutes they walked along in silence, and she looked at the houses they passed, all the familiar houses with the familiar flower-berry, the Ward's magnolia that was always the first tree to bloom in the spring but that didn't look like much now, in the fall, the Van Huyt's honeysuckle that you could smell long before you came to it and after you'd gone by, and the hedge of hyacinths beyond the big Pritchard place, the flowers not in bloom

not far from the truth. She had seen something so often and knew it so well, she could see it at all any more. It was the same with people around.

"Tell me something, Baby," her father said suddenly, "between you and me. Have you any idea what's the matter

"I didn't know anything was the matter with him."

She could feel him looking at her, but she kept her face turned away, watching the smoke rise above the Litchfield's terrace. They were having a cook-out. You could smell the charcoal.

"All right," her father said, and sighed. "All right. Let's turn back."

Mr. Nye looked up from his notebook at Zelda. "Mrs. Halliday, would you consider Mr. Whitton a ladies' man?" he asked.

What was behind that? she wondered. It struck her as a personal question, unlike anything he had asked her when he had been here before. She had tried to prepare herself for any kind of question that other time, and then most of it had been purely routine. How long had she known Mr. Whitton? Did she consider him a man of good habits? Dependable? Did he get along well with people? She had been greatly relieved and considered herself a fool for worrying. Mr. Nye was not here, after all, to get into her personal life. She had been as jittery as if it were the who were being screened.

She smiled and said, "Ladies' man? That dates you, Mr. Nye." Realizing she was being absurd, making parlor quips with a Federal investigator, but giving herself time to think how to answer

...was such a nice, quiet, ordinary-looking man. You'd expect, when she looked at him she would be nothing ominous or two-edged or dramatic suggestion at all.

"I think Lex has always been attractive to women," she said. "After all, he's a handsome man."

Mr. Nye did not look up at her. He appeared to be doodling in the notebook.

"I was thinking more of the extent to which women are attracted to him."

"I'm sure I don't know, Mr. Nye. This is the first time I've seen him in several years, as I've told you, and I haven't inquired into his amorous activities."

"I wasn't thinking only of the past few years. You said you've known him a long time." He flipped back the pages of his notebook, and then looked up at her. "Twenty-five years."

"Yes, that's right." She smiled. "But I don't understand. How could Mr. Whutton's attitude toward women twenty-five years ago affect his qualifications for this job now?"

She was almost surprised that he did not say, "I'm asking the questions, Mrs. Halliday," the way the detectives did in the whodunnits. The whole thing was a little unreal to her, even her own apprehensiveness.

"Not at all, unless we find some connection with the present. We just have to be careful," Mr. Nye said. He turned in his chair and crossed his legs, and he looked rather as though he might launch into an explanation of the new extended coverage insurance policy. "A man whose private life is irregular may be a bad risk for us. You've read, I'm sure, about homosexuals in the State Department who revealed secret information under threat of exposure. They got their jobs before we checked as thoroughly as we do now, and they've been cleaned out. In times like this we have to make certain that no one who is vulnerable to blackmail

...you can't see anything but the river."

"What do you want to know?" she asked him.

He nodded, as if he had always known she was a real woman and a good citizen. "As far as you're aware, has he been seriously interested in anyone else? Even when you knew him, before he married your sister?"

She wondered what it was, really, that Nye was trying to ask. Was he concerned with someone else now, someone else like Nancy Dellett—a woman in whom Lex had been interested twenty-five years ago and still knew? Did he think—? But that was too preposterous. No one else could have known about Lex's foolishness.

She smiled a little at Mr. Nye. "I don't think Lex was ever interested in anyone in particular. I think he played the field the way most young men did in those days. Probably conquest came easy for him. He was good-looking and a smooth talker and the girls were ready for him. You remember. Even the girls from the nicest backgrounds felt that conventions were still on their side. They wanted to live. Lex, I guess, was always willing to help them, but I don't think there was ever anyone special who met my sister. Of course it was a long time ago. I may have forgotten.

But it did not seem long ago at all. Now that Lex was back and Marcia—now that they were all together again—it seemed as though the time hadn't passed, as though everything were just the same there, the Studio and the speakeasies and the bathtub gin. You could just stand in the right spot in eternity, you would know all, how it was then, what was happening to them, and how it was with them now, and probably the way it would be tomorrow. Like the pilot flying over the river, who from his high vantage point sees so much that the man rowing his boat down the river cannot see—the rapids he has safely passed through.

"Have a drink," Lex said. "What have you got left?" There were no locks on any of the furniture in the Studio. They hid their liquor in bottles marked Hair Tonic and White Lotion and Hydrogen Peroxide. Lex began opening them as she waited before she could answer.

"The hair tonic's some new Scotch," she said. "Tony got it for me. A friend of his knows a steward on the Ile de France." Lex brought over the bottle and two glasses and sat beside her on the studio couch. "You've been seeing a lot of Tony, haven't you?"

"Any objection?"

He looked up at her, raising his eyebrows, and then carefully poured two drinks into the glasses. "Objections? What objections could I have?"

"Oh, none. None," she said, and heard her voice rising and could not stop it. "What's it to you? I'm just the girl you sneak in to see and make love to every chance you get, every time he's out like this. I'm just—"

"Shut up, Zel," he said quietly, thrusting the glass into her hand, "and drink your drink."

She subsided at once and sipped the whisky obediently. "I don't know what got into me," she murmured.

"I don't either. One of the things I've always liked about you," he said, "is that you take life the way it is and don't make any demands or ask any questions or make a big romance out of anything."

"I take what I can get, she thought, and it's never enough; it's never right. She huddled against the cushions with her head buried around and around in her hands.

"This is a lousy thing we've been doing, Lex. I'll March

"I'm not turning away from her because you told me to. It's my own decision—anyhow—that no matter what happened between us, she'd always be the one you loved. But I know that all the time I've really been hoping you'd change your mind, and I've been trying to get you to."

"Well." He looked at his drink a second and then drained it in one gulp. "What opened your eyes to all this?"

"It's just about time I faced it honestly, that's all."

"And you've decided to end everything between us?"

She looked at the strong, beautiful planes of his face and sighed. "I think it's the right thing to do, Lex. This is all pretty rotten. If Marcia knew about it, she'd never forgive us—she never trust anybody again. I don't know how I could have been so stupid."

She stopped and shook her head. "It was rotten, Lex."

He got up and poured himself another drink and stood looking down at her. "We're two healthy, normal, attractive people," he said.

"A man and a girl, thrown together constantly. It wouldn't be natural if we didn't feel the way we do. Are we supposed to suppress all our normal impulses because Marcia happens to be our sister?"

He took a gulp of his second drink and then set the glass down and put his hands gently on her shoulders. "We haven't hurt Marcia. I feel the same about her as I always did."

"It's only that I'm fond of you in another way."

She moved back from his hands. He had said all this before in different words, in the beginning and often since, and this was the first time it had completely failed to reassure her.

"What way?" she asked him.

He grinned and reached for her again. "Want me to tell you?"

"No," she said, and stood up. "I told you, Lex. It's all over."

He shrugged. "Just as you say. But don't kid yourself. You're a great one for kidding yourself."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Just don't think you suddenly got strong and noble."

"You're plastered," he said, beginning to tug at her wrist. "Listen to me. Listen. We're going to be married."

Zelda could see the color go out of her face under the mask. She looked at Zelda and then up at Lex and said nothing.

"Do you understand me? Do you know what I'm saying?" he asked her impatiently. "Or are you tighter than I thought?"

"I understand you," she said, and there was no longer any trace of thickness in her speech.

"Okay." He kissed her without putting his arms around her, just holding her by the wrist. "Okay. As soon as you can, make it."

He didn't say goodnight. He didn't look at Zelda. He just went out, letting the door slam behind him.

Marcia sat slowly down on the couch. "What happened, Zel?" she asked, almost in a whisper. "What brought that on? Did he say anything to him?"

"About you? No. He was telling me that nothing could ever change the way he feels about you, and then when you came in and mentioned Greg and all that—well, I guess he just made up his mind, that's all."

It sounded unconvincing and meaningless to Zelda, but Marcia smiled and a slow smile spread over her face. She settled back against the cushions, flinging her arms apart.

"Oh, Zel, I'd almost given up hope. I'd almost begun to think it was true, what mother always told us."

"She told us a lot of things."

Marcia's eyes crinkled. "I mean the one about men not running for a streetcar once they're in it."

Zelda sat down. "Oh," she said.

"What do you mean, 'oh.'?" Marcia laughed. "You're kidding, are you?"

"No," Zelda said. "No, I guess I knew it all the time."

"You know, Zel, not having to tie it down."

Zelda said. "Tomorrow?—Why, Tomorrow I may be with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years."

"That's right," Marcia said, with mild surprise. "And I'm in that. I still do, in a way. I mean, you have to live with it, while you have time, and you can't keep love by tying it down—you're more likely to smother it."

"Well, you didn't tie it down," Zelda said. "You certainly didn't tie it down."

"No," Marcia grinned. "The only trouble was, any of the other men I went around with—I don't know—it was like being stuck with a telegraph pole. Lex is the only one who's alive in my life. And I began to worry that he might stop coming around some day. How can you tell? He might not feel the same way about other girls as I do about other men. And then what? I'd be stuck with the telegraph poles the rest of my life." She closed her eyes and sucked in her breath, the way she did when something delighted her. "Oh, Zel, I'm going to have him for keeps. I'm glad for you."

"Don't let anybody fool you, Zel. Marriage may not be what Omar Khayyam had in mind, but women have to have it."

"I won't," Zelda said. "I won't let anybody fool me."

Mr. Nye was flipping the pages of his notebook again. "There's been some mention—this may have been later; yes, I see it." He looked up at her. "A Mrs. Walter Dellett seems to have been rather prominently in Mr. Whitton's life, from what I've been told. Do you know her?"

For a wild moment Zelda considered saying no. That would be the end of it. He would ask her nothing more. If she did answer him, she didn't know her.

"Yes," she said, "Yes, I used to be acquainted with Mrs. Dellett."

He studied the notebook. "Yes, of course."

"You once lay awake night after night, thinking about her, didn't she? Of course you did. You were in your husband's office, weren't you? And now you are thinking about her again, aren't you? And now you are thinking about her again, aren't you? Wondering. The fact is, you know her very well, don't you? Perhaps not quite as well as you might. I'm acquainted with Mrs. Dellett. There's very little I can tell you about her and Mr. Whitton, though," she said to Lex. "I know he knew her, that's all."

"When was that?"

"I believe it was just before he and my sister were married." He asked in a matter-of-fact voice, "You mean he was seeing her while he was engaged to your sister?"

"No, not exactly," Zelda said. "That is, they weren't exactly engaged, not formally at any rate. There had been some mention of marriage, but then Marcia got sick. She had to have her appendix out and she developed complications. It was almost two months before they could think again about getting married."

"And that was when Mr. Whitton was seeing Mrs. Dellett?"

"I believe so. There's no reason to think they were more than friends, though. Lex couldn't see Marcia for weeks. He'd been in the habit of coming to the Studio, where my sister and I lived, every night, but no one was home during that time—I was with Marcia, of course—and he probably felt lost. Nancy—Mrs. Dellett—was just someone to see, I imagine."

Zelda would go straight from work to the hospital every evening to visit Marcia, and Tony would meet her there when she had to leave at 8:30 and take her out to dinner.

Marcia was in a room with three other women. When you wanted privacy you drew a curtain between the beds, but for privacy it gave you was visual. Unless you whispered, you

was a little better than the others, but everything you said was just the same."

"I don't want it," Marcia said. "It's company. I don't want to yell, and there's no sense yelling at me when I'm sick."

Zelda would have hated it. She wasn't as at home with the kind of people as Marcia was, and she'd have stuffed the pillow over her mouth rather than let anyone hear her make a sound of pain. If it had been for herself, she thought she would have asked her parents for money to help her have a more comfortable illness, but Marcia would not hear of it.

"We chose to be on our own, didn't we?" she said. "All right, then we ought to see it through. Courage, hell," she answered something Zelda said. "It's stubbornness. After all this time, do you think I'm going to admit I can't get along without them?"

Their parents came for three days, when Marcia was her sickest. It was an uncomfortable time for all of them. The girls had both gone home for Christmas, and in the excitement of being back and seeing everybody—in the special, unchanging aura of Christmas—it had seemed almost as if they had never been away. But here in New York it was different. Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon were such strangers, so out of place, in the city where their daughters were so thoroughly at home. They were the ones who had to ask questions, who did not know what to do or where to go, who often did not understand what Zelda and Marcia were talking about.

As soon as Marcia rallied, they left—with relief, Zelda thought—and when they had gone, Zelda cried a little.

"What's the matter?" Marcia asked her. "Seeing them didn't make you homesick, did it?"

"Oh, no," Zelda said. "It's just that—I don't know—mama was so sort of humble and papa—Marcia, was papa never more than a couple of inches taller than I am?"

Even when she was allowed to have company, Marcia would not let her. She said it was because she looked awful, and when

"I can't, though. Not if I can help it. Lex is so kind, he will see the beautiful soul behind a first-thing-in-the-morning face. But it's hard on you, Zel, being here every evening, not being able to take a night off."

But Zelda wouldn't miss an evening. On Saturdays she came through at the office at one o'clock, and she went right to the hospital and stayed until visitors had to leave, and on Sundays she was there all day.

"You're a peach, Zel," Marcia said. "I won't forget it."

"You'd do the same for me," Zelda said.

Especially, she thought, if you'd been carrying on with my husband behind my back and felt rotten about it, now that it was over and knew there was no way you could ever feel better, but that you could show you had some kind of decency.

For a long time her behavior with Lex—which she had rationalized quite satisfactorily while it was going on—gnawed at her and appalled her. The man her sister loved. How could she have done it? She had always thought she had principles, a sense of honor and loyalty, yet she had been willing to toss everything away to be in Lex's arms. What sort of girl was she? Not anyway, the kind of girl she had always thought she was.

She believed when Marcia was so sick that she was going to die, and that that would be her retribution, but Marcia fought her peritonitis and got better, and Zelda realized it would have been a pretty unfair arrangement after all, to have Marcia die in order to punish Zelda for deceiving her. After a while, Zelda almost forgot that she had behaved so badly. She only remembered when someone said, "How could So-and-So have done such a thing?"

"If Tony asks you to marry him soon," Marcia said near the end of her stay in the hospital, "let's make it a double wedding. We ought to, you know. Two best friends and all that."

Zelda smiled. Marcia could be so sentimental for all that.

newly married couple. "I don't know how much he was making at least five thousand a month. He had a thousand in the bank."

"Talk," Marcia said. "All men talk like that until some time in their mind. You're making twenty-five a week, aren't you? You can get along on that for a while. Anyhow," she said practically, "his family's as rich as cream. They won't starve."

"Tony won't take anything from his family. I'm not sure he'll even go to work, either. He's funny about some things."

Marcia said, "Not Lev, thank goodness. If I quit my job, I think he'd cancel everything. And why not? Why should he keep himself out at the shipyard, while I sit on my behind and enjoy the money. Marriage is supposed to be a partnership."

"You'd be taking care of the home, wouldn't you?"

Marcia raised her eyebrows. "Me? You know better. The way I'll take care of a home, I can do it with my left hand. Fix my eyebrows, will you, Zel, and wind me up a little. Thanks." She looked speculatively at Zelda. "I think you could get him to marry you now if you played your cards right."

"I'm not very good at that kind of thing. I have to act the way I feel," Zelda said. "Anyhow, I wouldn't want to trick him into marrying me before he was really anxious to."

"Don't be an idiot. If every girl felt that way, nobody would get married. Men are never anxious to marry. One way or another, they all have to be tricked into it."

"That's a horrid idea," Zelda said. "I don't believe it."

Still, she couldn't help wondering. Marcia was not yet twenty-two, but she knew a lot about men. When Zelda went out with Tony that night she looked at him in a new way, and tried to think how, assuming one would be willing to stoop to such means, he could be lured into a definite proposal. He had talked about marriage and generally of marriage once or twice, but on the whole he had avoided the subject. Yet she knew he loved her.

On Saturday night and, as it turned out, Tony's birthday

His father had just been a birthday present. We're going to Lisbon, dear. We'll stop at your place while we're in your finest finery, and then—look—” He produced a small orchid. “I’ve got you an orchid, a beautiful five buck orchid. It’ll give you a rough idea of the spirit of things.”

She smiled at him. “I’ve never seen you like this. Is it just the money?”

“Just the money, she says! Woman, do you realize that since I got out of college I’ve had to think six times before I spent a buck? I haven’t been in a first-class restaurant or seen a show from orchestra seats or ridden in a taxi in two years. Tonight all that will be changed. And you want to know if it’s just the money!”

She looked at him through the gloom of the cab in which they were riding down to the Studio. He had his hat at an angle on the back of his head, a black homburg, she saw now. She also noticed for the first time that he was wearing a tuxedo under his black chesterfield, and that he had had several drinks.

“If all that means so much to you,” she said, “I don’t see why you didn’t go into your father’s business.”

“It doesn’t mean *that* much to me,” he said. “Everything’s relative.”

They went to the Ritz-Carlton first. When Tony saw on the bulletin board in the lobby that a wedding reception was going on in the Crystal Room, he decided they would crash it. Zelda saw how you could crash a wedding reception, but it turned out to be quite easy. They just walked in.

“There must be a thousand people here,” Zelda whispered. “Who do you suppose they are?”

“There aren’t a thousand,” he said. “And all they are, probably, is rich, like almost everybody except us. In the money business, maybe.”

Zelda had never seen anything like it. There were long tables around the room, heaped with food—turkey and salmon,

Weston, the tall, dark man, looking down at her with huge eyes. He was wearing a tuxedo and a white shirt with one of those big, gaudy, gaudy and gaudy of champagne. He was wearing diamond tiaras in their hair, and each of them wore at least one diamond bracelet.

"Do you like all this?" Zelda asked Tony, bursting a bubble as large as a fair-sized pearl between her tongue and the roof of her mouth. "I mean, would you want to live this way?" Tony squinted at her over his glass of champagne. "Why not? Wouldn't you?"

"Not especially. I've got pretty simple tastes," she said. "I'd take a hamburger and onions in preference to pheasant any day." She went on quickly, not stopping to think whether or not what she was saying was true, "And I wouldn't give two cents for all the diamonds in the world."

"No? Well, then you'll have to take emeralds," he said, and grinned. "You can't think I'd let you go around practically naked, without any jewelry, do you? How would it look, a man in my position?"

She might have been able to clutch it right then and there. She might have asked, "What have I to do with how it would look for you?" or even more directly, "Maybe your wife will prefer diamonds." Marcia would have been impatient with her for letting the chance slip. But she couldn't do it. She didn't know why, but she couldn't.

"I'll have all this some day if I want it." Tony waved his hand a little unsteadily and almost knocked the glass out of another man's grasp. "I'll have everything I want." He peered at her, his heavy eyebrows drawn together in a frown. "You don't have to sell jewelry to make money," he said with tipsy earnestness. "All you have to do is be smart at something and work hard and if you're smart enough and work hard enough you can make lots of money."

They left a few minutes later, headed for the Pennsylvania. "Let's walk," Tony said. "I'm sort of tight."

They went along Madison Avenue in silence for a while. Zelda

...and he enjoyed a good time as well. He had always been more serious than any of the other fellows, quieter. Finer, if you had to sum it all up. He never drank too much and he didn't take it for granted that every girl he saw would eventually be ready to sleep with him if he just worked it right. And when he talked about himself it was with enthusiasm for the work itself and for its future field of endeavor and accomplishment, rather than just means of becoming rich. Zelda felt now as if she did not know him at all. She felt depressed and hopeless. With all these years he had, it would be years before he'd want to get married. She stopped dead on the sidewalk. "I don't think I want to go to the Pennsylvania," she said. "I think I want to go home." "Why?" He turned and looked at her and then took hold of her elbow. "Have I done something, Zel?"

"No." She shook her head. "No, you haven't done anything wrong—" She stared up at him helplessly, the tears springing to her eyes. "I don't want to be rich," she said foolishly, scarcely knowing what she was saying. "I don't care about it at all."

He laughed gently. "All right," he said. "All right, Zel, you don't have to be." He sounded more like himself now. The cold February air seemed to have sobered him. "Only don't fall out on me tonight. Please. Tonight's important."

She thought he meant because it was his birthday, and she knew that it wouldn't really be nice to leave him on his birthday. It was only much later that night, actually the next morning, that she found out he hadn't been talking about his birthday at all.

He was wonderful after that. They stayed at the Pennsylvania for a long time, dancing to Guy Lombardo's orchestra, and he held her close, his cheek against hers, and told her how lucky he was to have found anyone like her.

"I didn't think you'd ever really fall for me," he said. "It's a little late in the game, that wasn't in character at all. You

that was what he was saying, that was what

he was saying, when you get to know me.

"I always thought it was in character," she said. "I was always anything for anyone you cared about."

"Well," he said, after a long pause. "Maybe I would."

They left the Pennsylvania a little after one and went to a night club called the Villa Venice, or more familiarly Ten East, from its address at Ten East 60th Street. It was about two o'clock in the morning at Ten East that Tony asked Zelda to marry him.

They had just finished a dance and were sitting at their table in a corner of the room. Tony gulped some black coffee—he was always drinking black coffee; this was his fourth cup of the evening—and then put the cup down and stared at the tablecloth.

"Zel, you know what this celebration was really about?" he asked her. "My freedom."

"What do you mean?" She leaned across the table toward him. "You aren't—weren't—married or anything?"

"No." He looked up at her and grinned suddenly. "No, Zel, not quite. But I was—well, crazy—really crazy, I think now—insane—about a girl who said she'd wait for me until I got married and then broke it off and got engaged to a guy that was all set to begin with." He found her hand in her lap and held on to it. "I didn't think I'd ever get over it. Even when I met you; even when I fell in love with you—I don't know if you can get what I mean—I told you I was crazy—but even then, she seemed to have some kind of hold on me." He began to shake his head and laugh. "Today I had lunch with—with a fellow I know, and he told me he'd been seeing an old girl of mine and he hoped I didn't mind. And all at once I knew I didn't mind at all. I didn't care what the hell she did, or with whom. It made me feel like a million bucks. I don't think I ever felt so good in my life."

He did not speak for a long time. Then she said, "But the

The door opened and Tony said, "I'm going to the bathroom. I'll be back in a minute."

He kept consulting the notebook. "Mrs. Dellett wasn't married at the time your sister was in the hospital, was she?"

"No," he repeated. "She had been engaged to Mr. Dellett, but she broke it off. Then apparently when Mr. Whitton and your sister married, she decided she had made a mistake and she married Mr. Dellett after all." He smiled at Zelda. "It could be a coincidence, of course. But it looks as if there was some connection, wouldn't you say? As if Mrs. Dellett and Mr. Whitton had been more than just casual friends?"

"Maybe. I didn't know anything about that," she said truthfully. "I was busy with my own wedding plans. But I still can't see the importance of any of this. Suppose Lex did have an affair with Nancy Dellett over twenty years ago, before either of them was married. How could that possibly make him a poor security risk now?"

Mr. Nye stared out the window. "I'm trying to start at the beginning, that's all. The chances are there's nothing to it any how." He repeated in his mild, almost apologetic way, "We have to be careful and thorough."

Someone knocked on the door, and Zelda called out, "Yes?" "I just want to know how much longer you'll be," Tony said from the hall, without opening the door. "I thought we might make the last show at the movies, if it isn't going to take much longer."

Mr. Nye looked at his watch and stood up. "You go ahead," he said. "Sorry to have kept you so long. I can come back another time."

But Zelda was in no mood for the movies. "Why don't you take Anna?" she asked Tony after Mr. Nye had gone. "I don't feel much like going out."

anyhow?"

He sat on faded blue denim slacks and a loud sport shirt. In the office he made a point of dressing conservatively, but it made him stand out among other advertising men. He had always dressed that way when she first knew him. He carried it to extremes. Whenever she thought of him, she pictured him in an oxford gray suit and a black tie. But there had been, in a curious way, a kind of rebellion, she was sure. But now he did not appear to be rebelling any longer, not in the office, anyhow. Here he wore the unconventional clothes that had become so conventional as to amount to the uniform of the middle-aged commuter at ease. He still looked a little strange in them.

"He wanted to know if Lex was a ladies' man," she said. "We went all the way back, twenty-five years, to find out, and we're not finished yet."

Tony grinned. "If that's going to keep Lex out of the Sales Department, he's through. He was the five-star wolf of Greenwich Village. But why should anybody care now, after all these years?"

There he was again, talking about Lex in that good-fellow, easy-convention way she hated. Dear old heartbreaker Lex. Here's a real man for you.

She moved her shoulders impatiently. "I don't know. I asked Mr. Nyc that myself. He says he has to start at the beginning."

"That's a clever place to start. Unique. Oh well, I guess he has to make a living too." He turned in his chair and looked at the papers on the desk. "I think I'll work a little, then. They're not going out." As she stood up to leave he asked, "Has he been called, has he?"

"No. But I really don't think there's anything to worry about. It's all right. If it's a new girl, I personally feel it's all right. I don't like what Libby was doing to him."

"Libby?" He looked up at her in surprise. "I always

she knew he supposed nothing of the sort. They had been together, he and Jim. All you had to do was see them together, watch Jim's carefully elaborated courtesy toward him, and you would know. It had been serious, Zelda was sure, yet Tony was not discussing it with her as he would have done ordinarily. She knew why, of course. It was something at the office, something that proved she had been right all along about Jim's not belonging there. Tony would admit it sooner or later, but not yet, not until he had to. Well, let him work it out, she thought. Let him stew a little. Maybe another time he'd listen to her.

But she felt a little sorry for him, and before she left the room she kissed his cheek and murmured, "Everything will be all right."

It would be, too, she thought, as she went downstairs for cigarettes. Once Tony accepted the fact that Jim was out of his element and let him go where he could use the ability he had, they'd both be much happier, and so would she. If this quarrel, whatever it was, would help hurry that time, so much the better. And if in some way it had extended to Libby, which it apparently had done (perhaps Jim had told her he couldn't stand her in the office and she had said in effect that he'd have to stand it or lose her) that was better still. He would find the right girl now, one who would encourage him to do what he was fitted for, what he really wanted to do.

The telephone rang as she reached the front hall. It was a strange, foreign-sounding voice, though almost without accent, asking for Ann.

"Who is this, please?"

"Ernstadt Weber here," he said. "I am the swimming instructor at the camp."

The name sounded familiar. She supposed Ann must have mentioned it. "Ann!" she called.

Ann looked at her and said, "You're not going to let me sit here, are you?"

"Not just now," Rena said. "The glider had already been out. Just something about camp."

She went out to the terrace and sat on the glider, rocking gently back and forth with her foot. It was only when she was here alone that she could get exactly the rhythm, the amount of swinging, she wanted. Tony liked to swing intermittently, just what made her dizzy; Jim pushed the glider so hard that it was impossible to relax; and Ann did not care about swinging at all.

Some day there might come a time when she could do exactly as she pleased whenever she pleased—eat everything she liked instead of catering to other people's tastes; live by a routine that suited herself, or by no routine at all; rock the glider in her own way at any hour of the day or night. It would have its advantages, but they would be outweighed by loneliness. If you wanted to live your own life, you had to live alone.

She lit a cigarette and leaned back, looking at the black sky through the trees that had begun to stir a little now in a cooling night breeze. Tony had once told her that they owned everything over their property, three miles up into the sky. The idea always fascinated her—the idea of owning part of the sky. It must remind Rena to brush that cloud away and polish up the little star over the dogwood tree . . .

If only she could just sit here quietly like this and enjoy her air and her trees and her sky, and not think of anything else. Some people could. Some people somewhere. The Australian aborigines, for instance. She had read about them once. They worked only enough to produce what they needed to live, and everybody shared in it. The rest of the time they made love and raised families and enjoyed what they had, and because what they had was all they wanted and no one of them had more than anyone else, they had no need to wage war or to struggle or fight among themselves. Of course they were uncivilized, nothing but savages.

How did I get here, Zelda wondered, on this peculiar day?

plex and how could she cope with it? How did we all get so lost and entangled in the problem of an individual's survival to enjoy surviving? You could blame "the times," she thought. You could blame "the times." But society made the times, and they had made the times. She had made them. She had made Marcia and Lex and Tony—and Nancy Dellett.

She sighed, and pushed lightly against the flagstones with her foot so that the glider rocked gently. The layers of years had softened and muffled the voice of doubt. Only once before, ten years ago, had it broken through and screamed in her ear that Nancy Dellett had never really lost her hold on Tony, that he had convinced himself he loved Zelda and wanted to marry her because he thought that was the best way to cure himself.

The voice was not screaming now, but she could hear it plainly. Mr. Nye had brought it all back to her. How did she know everything was over? She wanted to think so, and she had a way of thinking what she wanted to, but it wasn't always possible.

I'm trying to frighten myself again, she thought, and remembered the time a few weeks ago when Tony's train had been late and she had imagined an accident, Tony killed, and her life going on without him. She was being neurotic again, imagining things because someone had mentioned Nancy Dellett's name.

As she stood up to go into the house, Marcia and Lex drove into the garage, and she waited, feeling she did not want to see them at that moment, but after a few minutes Lex came to the terrace, looking for her.

"Hello," he said. "Tony said you were out here."

"Where's Marcia?"

"She's coming." He sat down on the wrought iron chaise and loosened his tie. He always wore a jacket and tie, unless it was unbearably hot. "She had to go to the little girl's room," he said.

He was the only man she knew who could have made that remark without sounding coyly vulgar. There was in him something indefatigable and mysterious—personal charm, animal

...over and over that he wasn't any good, and
away from him.

"I wanted to talk to you alone anyway," he said. "I want
to know what happened with Dick Tracy."

She sat down again, not on the glider this time but on
a high chair. She felt better able to deal with him from
a high chair.

"What makes you think anything happened that can't be
discussed in front of Marcia?"

He smiled, and it occurred to her suddenly to wonder whether
his marvelous teeth were the same ones with which he had
smiled at her twenty-five years before.

"We don't have to pretend with each other, Zel. We're old
friends. You know there are all kinds of things in my life I
couldn't want Marcia to hear about."

"I don't know anything of the sort. I lost track of you a long
time ago. Besides, what possible difference can it make to Marcia
any more?"

He leaned back, and a light from the house picked up the
outline of his profile. His unfading good looks were gratuitous
in his thought. He could have been ugly and fared as well.

"You can't have missed the fact," he said with amusement,
"that I'm courting Marcia." He added seriously, "I wouldn't
want it spoiled."

"Are you in love with her, Lex?"

He did not answer immediately. When he did speak, he was
staring looking at the sky, and his voice was quiet.

"I'm very fond of her, and I think we could get along better
here we couldn't before. She wouldn't expect as much of me
as I found out there are harder weaknesses to live with than
I thought. And I'd be marrying her for better reasons than
the first time—for companionship and comfort."

"The kind of comfort her money will buy?" Zelka asked.

"I'll be with her all the time, and she needs that. I'll be gone when she needs me most. It was. Our quarrels were only because she wanted to be something I couldn't be, but she knows better now. 'We'll be all right together.' He smiled a little. "I don't want to get her somebody who didn't care about her. Nothing else will get her a man any more, Zel. I know I can't appreciate her and enjoy her, but you have to remember she's nearing fifty now and fat, and somebody's likely to marry her and grab everything she has and then walk out on her. I don't want to live with her."

Zelda's throat burned with tears, but whether for Marcia or for Lex or for all the pitiful compromises people became willing to make with life she did not know.

"There's probably something wrong with that, but I'm not sure what it is. You could always make anything sound plausible," she said. "I still believe in love, though. Perhaps that's unbecoming at my age? But I think that was a better reason for marrying Marcia than this, even if it didn't work out."

He leaned back again, not looking at her. "I didn't say love was the reason the first time. It wasn't. I had no intention of getting married at all then. I did it out of what is classically known as pique."

"Pique? Who piqued you?"
"You. You and Tony," he said. "I always seemed to want something Tony had—something psychological, no doubt. I did."

Zelda stood up. "Cut it out, Lex," she said, and even while she was thinking what strange and ineffectual words those were for her to use, she was repeating them. "Cut it out."

He smiled. "There's nothing to cut out, Zel. I'm just stating some facts, that's all. I know there isn't anything to be done about them. And now tell me, before Marcia gets back," he said, "what that fellow wanted to know."

He looked down at him, and she didn't know whether he was

A simple, direct, and unassuming man, he knew
himself as a man of the world, and he was
always had.

Mr. Nye asked me about you and Nancy Dellett,
and then she walked away from him, into the house.

The party was not like any Jim had ever seen. There was
liquor, and everybody drank all night, but nobody got
sick or sick or even very high, as far as he could notice. They
talked, and the more they drank the more intellectual their talk
became. He could not always follow it, but he enjoyed listening
anyhow. They all seemed to consider him part of whatever
discussion was going on, even if he didn't contribute anything.
Some way or other they made him feel that he belonged there,
that he was the host, and he got a kick out of that. He won-
dered if they had any idea how old he was.

Hallie did, anyway—at least, she probably did, since it would
be easy enough to find out at the office—and it made no differ-
ence to her. It wouldn't to her friends either, he was sure. Age
had nothing to do with a group like this.

Someone put a record on the phonograph, and after a moment
a woman asked, "Good God, must we have that?" She was a
tall, homely woman dressed in something black that showed off
her good figure. He thought she was the one who was an editor
for some fashion magazine. "I can't stand Wagner," she said.
"All that bombast. I'm sure he's carrying on like that in Hell.
He's a slimy little man, and I hope he's bursting the eardrums of
his henchmen, Hitler and Nietzsche and the rest, but I don't
see why he has to offend mine."

The man who had put the record on shrugged his shoulders
and turned it off again. "All right. I can listen some other time.
But you're dangerously off the beam, Maida—you know that,
don't you? Condemning the music because the music isn't
the way you doesn't conform to yours? Shades of the Committee."

"I don't know what they mean," he said. "I don't know," said the thin man, and then he said, "I don't know," and he was all over in a tree face, and he wore a striped shirt and a Countess Mara tie. "You," he said, and his eyes always seemed to be staring. "Have you been to Korea?"

"Not yet," Jim said.

"Well, how do you feel about it? If you have to go, will you know why?"

This was the kind of talk that was all right with a bunch of your own age. You could bat it around and say what you thought, and if you didn't put it too well no one cared. No one cared much anyway. You could talk and talk and it wouldn't change anything. But here, in a crowd like this, you were expected to be deep and clever.

"I think so," he said slowly. "I think it's because if we don't stop them in Korea they'll break out all over, because they'll feel they can get away with it."

He looked down at Hallie to see if it had sounded all right, but he couldn't tell from her face. She just seemed to be listening.

"That's an oversimplification," the thin man said. "They're going to break out anyway, whenever and wherever they see fit. What will we do? Send men scurrying to be killed in every trouble spot on the globe? Where will we get that many men?"

"I think—" someone began, but the other man cut him off.

"I'm asking this young fellow," he said. "He's directly involved. I want his opinion."

Jim shifted in his chair. "Maybe they won't be in such a hurry to start something again, if we stop them here. If they do—well, I guess we'll have to handle it as it comes up. I don't see what else we can do. We can't sit back and let them push everybody around."

Someone said, "Hear, hear," and Jim couldn't tell whether it was a joke or not, but either way it embarrassed him.

"And you're willing to slog around in the Korean rain?"

this man said. "I suppose the in-laws are the same South Koreans you know. The chances are you never even saw them. These South Koreans a few years ago—won't be pushed around. What?" he sighed. "I suppose that's very commendable."

The guy sounded like a Commie, Jim thought. He said, "I don't want to die in the Korean mud. I don't want to die in the mud. But they've got to be stopped, or they'll be coming over the next thing you know."

"I'm surprised you haven't enlisted, if you feel that way," the thin man said. "What are you waiting for?"

Jim looked at him and wondered how many wars he had been in. None, he was willing to bet. He was a 4 F if he'd ever seen one, and besides he talked like a Commie.

"I'm in no hurry," Jim said. "They'll let me know when they need me." He got up, pulling Hallie with him. "Come on," he said. "Let's get a drink."

They went to the portable bar at one end of Hallie's long living room. Behind them the talk swelled again, swallowing up what Jim and the thin man had said. Jim mixed two highballs, the way Hallie liked them.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"What for?" He concentrated on snaring ice cubes with the silver tongs. "What have you got to be sorry for?"

She lit a cigarette and leaned against the bar. He could feel her eyes on his face, but he didn't look up. He was burning and he knew it was silly.

"Clark upset you," she said. "I don't like you upset."

"Who is he, anyway?"

"Clark Cullen, the illustrator. He was in the Navy for three years in the war, a lieutenant, and he's just been called back. That's why he talks like that. He has a boy who was born while he was away, and he feels he's just begun to know him."

"Oh." Jim looked down into his glass. He laughed a little. "You're a great judge of people," he said. "You should know what I was thinking."

"How could it be?" he thought. "I wish they would stop it. It's not fair." He began to pound. "I wish they would stop it. I wish they would stop it. I wish they would stop it." He drank down fast, and felt its heat going down his body and thought for a second that he was going to kiss Hallie and take her out of there, that he couldn't stand another minute. But then somebody started playing college on the piano, some Penn man singing that one about "Any day, lady?" and it was such a funny note just then that it made him all right again.

It was something, though, what she could do to him, this girl. He'd never felt this way about anybody, never this worked up in his life. The thing was he'd never known a girl like her. He had had a few girls, the kind who didn't stop you in the back of a car or on the sofa when nobody was home, and once or twice he had a room somewhere and that had been pretty awful, but it had never been such a big deal when you came right down to it, just something you took because it was there, it was expected of you, and you got to thinking you wanted it. And then there were the girls who did stop you, and you knew they were going to so you sort of geared yourself to it. Someone like Libby, for instance— But he didn't want to think of Libby.

Hallie Breed was different. She was smart and attractive and sophisticated, and he thought she could have had any man she wanted. He couldn't see why she was interested in him, but she was. There was no question about it. She had let him know right from the beginning that she'd like him to date her, and she had made as many advances as he had.

The thing was that he wasn't sure about her. He wasn't sure what she wanted of him, what she expected. He had kissed her good night a few times, and she had clung to him and kissed him back very expertly and as if she meant it, but then she had always smiled at him and pushed him away a little and told him it was time for him to go home. Maybe she wanted him to stay, but he wasn't going home, that he was going to stay, but he didn't know; he couldn't tell. He didn't want to put himself

Well, this was the first time Jim had ever seen a room like this. The walls were white, the floor was polished, and the furniture was all different. Jim had never seen a black rug before. The two sofas at either end of the room were gold. On the walls were a lot of little tables, all different odd shapes, stood a lamp with a seal, impressionistically carved out of black wood, and a gold shade with a similar seal splashed in paint. The drapes that covered an entire wall when drawn made a lamp shade. But if Hallie had asked him why he thought the room was like her, he could not have put it into words the way she did.

A girl came over to him now with a drink in her hand. She was the only girl here as young as Hallie, but she was funny-looking, with a big nose and dyed orange hair and short, fat legs. Her name was Rhoda Byce and she had some kind of important job at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Everybody here had some kind of important job somewhere, yet not one of them was in what Jim thought of as "business."

"So you're Hallie's new beau," she said. She had a deep, hoarse voice that grated on his ears. "Jim," she said. "Jim Halliday, right?" She looked him over. "I don't get it."

"You don't get what?"

"Joe College," she said. "Hallie and Joe College. It's a new combination." She smiled, and he decided she looked exactly like a horse. "You're kind of pretty, though. All that curly hair."

He wanted to tell her that she was not kind of pretty. He would have given five bucks to be able to say it, but he couldn't. He couldn't say a thing like that to a girl, no matter how she looked at him, though he was damned if he knew why.

"How do you know Hallie?" he asked her.

She put the edge of the glass in her mouth and stuck her nose down into it, but when she was finished he couldn't see that any more of the drink was gone. "Everybody knows Hallie."

"How? New York's a big place."

"It is not." Everything she said sounded rude. {"At last!"}

a big black man, and he was a little older. It was a certain sort of a man, a man of that sort of the city, a man who was a work you do or how much money you have, who your grandfather was, you know everybody else who is a sort of person, or if you don't know 'em you've heard of 'em. She sat down on the windowsill and looked up at him, showing her big teeth. "The Fraziers know the Huttons and the niggers in Harlem have a nodding acquaintance and the editor of Chic hates the publisher of Slick and I know Hallie Breed."

Before he could ask her in what particular way she and Hallie were the same kind of people, Hallie came back from the other side of the room and joined them. He noticed now that she had on a new dress, and he wished he had noticed it before and said something. He had told her once that he couldn't tell when a black dress was new that he always went by the color, and after that she had made him look carefully at everything she wore until he got to know the difference. She said it was one of the things what she called a knowledgeable man should understand.

"Well, look." She put her hand through Jim's arm and smiled at Rhoda Dyce, "So you two found each other in the jungle."

"I found him," Rhoda said. "It wasn't hard. I kept looking behind ears. All the others were bone dry."

"You mean the men stood still long enough for you to see?"

Rhoda showed her horse teeth. "God, you're a stinker," she said.

"I'm only beating you to it, darling."

"All right," Rhoda said, pleasantly enough. She stuck her nose down into her glass again for a second and then took it out. "Have it your way. You always do anyhow." She got up from the windowsill and began walking away from them. "I don't dig this set-up, though. I really don't. You're not *that* old."

Hallie looked for a minute as though she were going after her. Then she laughed and turned around to Jim. "Do you think this calls for another drink?"

"That's surprising. Rhoda's a funny duck, but I'm sure she's quite brilliant, though you'd never guess it meeting her this. You ought to hear her lecture on art; even her hands different. She once told me that after she spends the day looking at all the beautiful women on the walls of the museum she begins to feel beautiful herself—and then she sees herself in the mirror."

"That's sort of gruesome."

"Not really. She has a sense of humor about it. Surprising, though, she gets along all right with men, though not always with the men she'd chose. You, for instance. Apparently she didn't make any headway with you."

Jim laughed. "She doesn't think much of me."

"Don't be dull, lamb. She'd give her eye teeth for you. That's why she was making the cracks." Hallie looked up at him. "You really don't know how attractive you are, do you? That's one of your charms."

Jim felt himself getting red. Like a Goddam kid, he thought, but there was no way to stop it. He couldn't get used to being told things like that, right to his face. They all did it around here, whether what they had to tell you was pleasant or unpleasant, and everybody else seemed to enjoy it and to have a quick answer. It was like a game, their whole way of conversation, and he liked watching it but he wasn't any good at playing himself. Not yet, anyhow.

"Come along," Hallie said. "We'd better get that drink." She was chuckling a little, laughing at him, but it didn't bother him. There was something in it, a kind of tenderness, that made him feel good. She looked up at him. "They're beginning to leave. You'll stay a while, won't you?"

He grinned. "Okay, if you want me to."

"I want you to." She smiled up at him. "You look just like your father when you grin that way."

He stood for a minute and watched her thread her way

Spring, and he'd be back. He'd be back to his regular enlist in the army. He had a girl in his mind, and he'd be five years old, and he figured if he wanted to finish college and get married, and had to start looking for a job and getting married, he'd get out, it would be at least another five years. In the meantime he'd make good pay pretty soon, and he could almost get married almost right away. He couldn't see much sense in wasting another year at college, because where was it going to get him, with things the way they were?

That was one problem Jim didn't have anyhow. When he got out, he'd be able to step right into . . .

But he didn't want to think about that. He thought of the man at Hallie's who had asked him how he felt about Korea. People were always asking you that. How the hell did they think you felt? It was a lousy, rotten business and you wished you had been born some other time or something, but there was nothing you could do about it. You hoped you'd be lucky and never have to get into any fighting, that it would be over before they took you, or that you'd be stationed in this country or maybe some place like Germany, but if you weren't lucky then you'd have to sweat it out like a lot of other guys.

Nobody but the fellows his own age seemed to see it that way, though. The others were bitter, like that one at Hallie's, or crazy to get into it (to hear them talk, anyhow) and thinking you ought to be crazy too.

He'd had a conversation about it with his father once, a year or so ago, and his father had said, "I don't understand you. Isn't there anything you really care about? I don't want you to go. God knows, but you ought to feel differently. You're young. There ought to be something you'd be ready to die for."

"I'm ready," Jim said. "I just don't see why anybody would want to go running after it, that's all. How many wars did you fight in?"

His father had smiled. "I was thirteen when the first world war ended. When I tried to get into the second one, I was almost

forty. And he'd been in the C.V. But you're right, it's not a good idea to talk when it isn't quiet.

Jim stopped walking and leaned against the stone retaining wall along the side of the transverse. He didn't want to think about that. His stomach hurt, and he guessed if anybody looked out at any of the cars whizzing by and saw him, they'd think he was a drunk. As a matter of fact, he was a little loopy. He wasn't used to as much as he'd had tonight. He really didn't like to drink that much, because it only made him feel like hell afterwards. For a while at school he hadn't touched it at all because he'd been trying out for track, but then he hadn't made the team. The coach said he didn't put his heart into it, but it wasn't that. He just wasn't good enough. He wasn't good enough at anything, except maybe putting a motor together, and where did that get you? His father had been on the team when he was at Dartmouth. He had run the hundred in ten seconds.

But Jim wanted to think of something else. Hallie. He started walking again, thinking of Hallie. She could take your mind off anything. That night he'd driven down from Westchester after talking to Ann, not knowing where he was going, just wanting to get away somewhere, and Hallie was the one who had fixed him up. He had parked the car and walked around for two hours, and then all at once he had remembered that she'd told him he could drop in any time.

"I'm glad you came," she had said. "I've been hoping you would."

He answered, not very tactfully, "I didn't know where else to go," but she didn't seem to mind.

"You can always come here," she said.

"You're swell. You act as if you'd known me all my life."

"I wish I had. I wish I'd known you when you were a little boy, so I could have mussed up your curls. You'd have hated it, but I'd have done it anyway."

He still did hate it. He couldn't stand anybody fooling with his hair. But he grinned at her and said, "It's not too late."

"Not it is." She put down her drink and looked at him, her

that he tried to treat her impetuously in his own way suggested, but he couldn't have been very good at it. In the train, his father said, without looking up from his paper: "Hallie Breed's pretty strong stuff for you, Jim. Be careful."

Jim hadn't bothered to deny anything. "Careful in what way?" he asked politely. "Do you think she'll lead me astray?"

His father rattled the paper, and Jim knew he had succeeded in annoying him, but it didn't show in his voice when he spoke. "I don't think I've ever interfered with you much, Jim. I always made up my mind I wouldn't, that I'd remember how I felt when my parents tried to interfere with me. This is just a word of caution, that's all, and then you can do as you like."

"Yes, sir?" Jim said, though he had never in his life called his father "sir."

Tony glanced at him and then back at his paper. "Hallie's way over your head, believe me. She's much older than you, not only in years but in every other way. She's quicker and smarter and smoother than you'll be in ten years, or maybe than you'll ever be. Why should she be interested in a kid like you?" He stopped and put down his paper and shook his head. "I'm not doing this very well, am I? I'm saying all the wrong things. The trouble is I'm young enough to know how you feel, and old enough to know it isn't any good." He looked out the window. "Maybe that's why it's so damn tough to be a parent now. There never was a generation of parents that stayed young so long."

"I see," Jim said.

"All right," his father said angrily. "All I want to tell you is that Hallie's after something, and you'd better watch it or you'll get hurt. I know girls like Hallie."

"I'll bet you do at that," Jim said.

He began to run through the transverse, saying Goddamn goddamn goddamn over and over to himself. If you said it very

fast, you know, and he was a fast man. He knew if he didn't get it done in a few minutes, then he looked at his belt, and he first of all looked to the chimes repeating their two o'clock noon, and then he answered.

He liked working in the library. He had never liked it much at school and he had stayed away from it when he could. The atmosphere was too tense, too unnaturally quiet. All those guys feverishly trying to find out something they had to know for paper. But here everything was relaxed, and you got the feeling that people were quiet because they wanted to be, because they had come here to read something or look something up that they were interested in knowing.

Not that he usually was much interested himself in what he was looking up. The stuff on plastics was all right, and he didn't mind knowing about old sailing ships, but he sure as hell didn't care how many different kinds of tea there were, for instance. But it was all right. It was easy. He didn't have to remember any of it or worry about getting marked on it. He just wrote down whatever he could find and took it back to the office so the copy writers could use it. If he felt like it, he could make the job his. It was cool in there, peaceful, and nobody knew him. If he was tired, he could keep a book open on the table in front of him and take a little nap.

This time it was a few days after the party at Hattie's. He had found out as much as he needed on the growing of pineapple so that the copywriters could tell about the lovely people who had gone to all that trouble and expense just so you could have this delicious canned fruit at your table. He debated whether he should stay around a little longer, but it was nice out, cooler, and he thought he'd take a slow walk instead, up toward the office.

He didn't pay any attention to the sailor leaning up against one of the stone lions, didn't even see him until the sailor moved in front of him and spoke.

"Hi, son," he drawled. "You gonna pass me by?"

This guy had a real gut-stomped in Hawaiian having him.

The bar was as crowded now, at almost three o'clock as it was at one. Jim was afraid Wick would feel conspicuous because he was the only one there in uniform. He was pretty conspicuous anyway, with his bright red hair and six-foot-four height and hillbilly drawl. But nobody paid any attention. Jim should have known better. If they had, it wouldn't have bothered him. He pushed his sailor hat to the back of his head and grinned at the bartender and ordered a beer. You didn't drink beer at the Whitney bar at three in the afternoon, but Jim ordered one too.

"Well, how is it so far?" Jim asked him. "Where are you stationed, anyhow?"

"Cape May," Wick said. "Boot camp. It's okay now, but after the summer they say everybody goes home and everything's closed up and it's the stinkiest little dead town you ever saw. The base is nice, though. Lots of steak and all."

"Why didn't you let me know? You didn't have to be in such a hurry for the Coast Guard, did you? Why didn't you talk to me or something?"

Wick made a funnel of his mouth and poured the beer down steadily. When it was gone he said, "I had enough talk. That's all I had since I got back home, talk. Enlist. Don't enlist. The Air Force is good, the Air Force is lousy. The Navy is what you ought to get into. If you get in the Navy you never get out. The Coast Guard—" He banged his glass on the bar. "Hey, son, another beer, please! The Coast Guard was closing their enlistments. I had to make up my mind, so I did. That's one thing." He grinned. "I don't have to worry no more or listen to no more talk. I did it."

"Yeah," Jim said. "I know what you mean." He rolled his glass around between his hands. "What about Helen?"

"Helen?" He said the name as if he wasn't sure who Jim meant. "She'll keep, I guess. She kept nearly six years already, so I guess a little longer won't hurt anything." He looked sick.

Well, Jim said, "I might."

"Now if you got other plans or anything—"

"No. No, I haven't any plans. Hell, and what if I did? anyhow? I couldn't let you waste your three day pass, could I?"

"Maybe Libby would know a girl for me," Wick said.

"Libby. Yes, I guess maybe she would." Jim slid off his coat.

"Look, I've got to get back to the office now. I'm not supposed to stay out this long. I'll see what I can fix up and call you later. Where are you stopping anyway?"

"I've got a room at the Hotel Waldorf," Wick said.

Jim stared at him. "The Waldorf? The one on Park Avenue?"

"Sure," Wick said. "I haven't got anything better to spend my pay on than a bang-up couple days."

When Jim got back to the office, there was a message that his father wanted to see him as soon as he came in. He took his notes from the library with him. Now that he looked at them, they didn't seem like so much for four hours' work. But his father wasn't likely to ask for them. He never had before.

Miss Regan, his father's secretary, told him to go right in. She was a nice-looking woman. There wasn't a bad-looking woman in the place.

"He's waiting for you, Mr. Halliday," she said.

He still couldn't get used to people's calling him Mr. Halliday. Not that many did. But he always felt a little as if they were kidding him.

He opened the heavy flush door and let it swing silently closed behind him. His father sat at a huge circular mahogany desk in the middle of the room. There was a handsome dark blue inkblot on the floor instead of a rug, because Tony rolled himself all over the room in his swivel chair, around his desk and from his desk to the ceiling-high bookcases that lined the walls and to the windows that looked out over most of the rooftops of Madison Avenue. There were three other chairs in the room, two straight-backed ones and a contour chair, which Tony had

bought a new one. He had a new chair for himself. Anyone he wanted to buy at a disadvantage.

"I can't be very forceful," he had told Jim once, "with my old air."

There was nothing else in the room but a water cooler, mounted in one panel of the wall, and a pastel drawing of Zerk and the two children, done when Jim was about twelve, in pale colors and a sugary style that did not belong in this room at all.

When Jim entered, his father had a layout spread out on the desk, and he had rolled his chair around in front to look at it so that his back was to the door. He said, "Sit down, Jim," without looking up.

Jim sat in one of the straight chairs. His belt felt too tight across his stomach.

"This is the double page Man with the Sling spread for the *New Yorker*," his father said. "Want to take a look?"

"I never can tell much from layouts."

"All right. I'll explain it to you."

Jim got up obediently and bent over the sheet. There were two sketchy drawings of a man with his arm in a sling. On one side he was sitting at a table with other figures and a bottle and glass. On the other side he was in an easy chair by himself, with a glass in his hand. Blocks of what would be type ran down next to each picture, under the two headings. At the Club and At Home.

Tony started to say something. "I get it," Jim broke in. "It's pretty simple."

"Yes," his father said. "All good advertising is simple."

Jim went back to his chair and sat down. He looked up at the ceiling. "Isn't it getting to be a little silly, though? This guy with his arm in a sling all these weeks? No matter what he did to his arm it wouldn't be in a sling this long." He felt as if he had to keep on talking. "Look at that *New Yorker* cartoon showing all those men coming out of the plastic surgeon's office with their arms in slings. Everybody's laughing at the whole thing now. It can't—"

"That's fine. Goodbye," Jim thought. "I'm thinking about it. I don't care what you say about me or if he hadn't seen the ad he asked me to write it meant. 'I don't care what you say about me or if he hadn't seen the ad he asked me to write it meant.' That's advertising."

Jim could not think of anything else to say.

"Well." His father pushed himself around to the right side of the desk, his chair sailing over the waxed linoleum like an iceboat. "This isn't what I called you in about. I wanted to talk to you about spending so much time out of the office. Four hours this morning, for instance. It doesn't look right, Jim. After all, you're not an account executive. You're supposed to be starting at the bottom, and there's not much leisure at the bottom."

"I was at the library," Jim said. "I was doing research on pineapple."

His father smiled a little. "I know. I keep in touch. It didn't take you four hours. In an hour—possibly an hour and a half—I could get enough depe on pineapple to write a treatise."

"Maybe," Jim said. "But I'm not a Phi Beta."

His father began doodling all over the bottom of the layout. "What's the matter, Jim? What's this resentment you've worked up these past few weeks? We'd better have it out."

"There's nothing to have out."

His father sighed. "Listen, I don't want to get sentimental. But I always thought we were pretty good friends and that we had respect for each other not only as father and son but as men. I thought—"

"Excuse me," Jim said, "but it seems to me you are being sentimental. You can't get away from being father and son."

"I don't intend to try. All I mean is that fathers and sons don't always feel as they're supposed to just because of their relationship, but I thought you and I did. I've taken it for granted that if you were in any kind of jam, mental, emotional, anything, you'd give me a chance to see if I could help."

"I think you're still being sentimental. The only kind of jam that guys go to their fathers about is if they need dough."

Tony said, "I'll punch hole in the paper, making a hole through it. 'That's all right, Jim," he said. "I don't know what you want, but if you're sure at me about something, let's have it. If you're sure at somebody or something else, don't take it out on me. I don't like people working for me with a chip on their shoulders."

Jim asked courteously, "Would you rather I'd quit?"

His father looked at him sharply. "Do you want to quit? Is that it? You don't have to be afraid to say so. Plenty of fellows don't like working for their fathers." He smiled. "I won't be offended, I promise you."

"You don't have to worry," Jim said. "If I ever decide I want to quit I'll let you know right away."

His father didn't answer. He was making a mess of the lay-out, and that pansy, Stillman, who had probably done it, was going to be rarting around the office, waving his hands and yelling that nobody had any respect for craftsmanship, the way he did almost every day.

"All right, Jim. We don't seem to be getting anywhere." His father looked up at him. "You've learned something here at that, haven't you? For a beginner, that was as fine a job of fogging the issue with words as I've ever heard"

Jim waited a minute, and then since his father seemed to be finished, he got up and moved toward the door.

Behind him, Tony said, "It would probably do me a lot of good to kick you through that door. But as you say, we can't get away from being father and son. So take your four-hour history of the pineapple to the copy department and get back to your desk."

Jim went down the hall to Hallie's office. He felt great, all keyed up. He didn't know when he had felt so good, as if he could do anything. Hallie was alone in her office, too.

She said, "Hello, darling," in a low voice. "Say, you're looking mighty pleased with yourself. What have you pulled off?"

"Nothing. My roommate's in town. We had a couple of drinks." He didn't say beer. "Here. Do you want to take charge"

ence. He went back and sat down at the desk again, and he had to expect anything. A few fellows were in the room.

"Maybe it's too bad you ever bothered with me in the first place," Jim said. "It there was going to be all this stink about it, I don't see why you did. Maybe I'd better just fade out as far as you're concerned, and not only down here. Then you wouldn't have to worry any more. You'd be nice and safe in your little job."

"Oh, Jim, don't be childish."

"I thought we'd get around to that, sooner or later."

She spread her fingers out meticulously on the desk. "Look, lamb—"

"I wish you wouldn't call me that."

"Jim," she said, and then repeated it. "Jim. Remember all this is different for you. This is your father's office. You can horse around all you like, and maybe you'll get hawled out, maybe even docked a little, but you won't be fired. You don't even have to be any good, but still the place will probably be yours some day if you want it. Me, I'm just a poor girl trying to get along. I've got to be careful."

"Borscht. You could quit tomorrow and marry some rich guy the day after."

"Believe it or not, sonny, I don't want to marry some rich guy. I want to keep my job and get ahead in it. I'm good, you know. I'm damn good. If I get the breaks, I can go far."

"Okay. Fine. So where do I come in?"

"Oh, Jim, go away now before somebody comes. You're being nosy. Call me up at home tonight, after you've had a chance to think."

He stood up. "Maybe I will," he said, "and maybe I won't. He tried to slam the door behind him, but you couldn't slam those heavy doors.

She could go to hell. He had planned to ask her to get another girl and go out with him and Wick tonight. Now she could go to hell. She wouldn't be any good for a date like that, anyhow.

She wouldn't understand a girl like Wick, and he wouldn't understand her. But he had an idea of rocking Wick like the baby that may he'd been travelling in since his mother had last seen him. But Wick wouldn't be impressed. He just wouldn't understand her.

He passed Stillman coming down the hall. The old guy had the Man with the Sling layout fluttering from his hand like a ragged banner, its bottom punched full of holes. His face was red and he was talking to himself.

"Hi," Jim said.

Stillman stopped and looked at him as if he were trying to remember who he was. "Oh," he said. "Yes, Jim. I think they want you to paste up some ads." He never admitted that he himself wanted anyone to do anything. It was always "they." He waved the layout under Jim's nose. "Just look at this. A day's work, and look what they do to it. Nobody has any respect for anything any more."

Several rooms were empty, their inhabitants on their vacations. Jim slipped into one and picked up the phone.

"Give me an outside wire, please," he said in a deep voice.

"Is this young Mr. Halliday?" the girl at the switchboard inquired.

Jim laughed. "You were supposed to think it was Quinlan."

"Mr. Quinlan's on vacation. But I'd know your voice anyhow."

"You would, huh? Well, listen, Sylvia, you don't know I'm here, okay? If my—if anybody's looking for me, you think I'm doing something for Mr. Stillman. If he's looking for me—oh hell, I'll only be a minute anyhow. Give me an outside wire."

While he waited for the number, he sat down and put his feet on the desk. It was a desk like his father's, only smaller, and pushed to one end of the room to make space for all the other furniture. Quinlan was an account executive. He had an artificial fireplace in his office with two modern love-seats facing each other at either side of it. Over the fireplace was a finger-painted picture, nothing but swirls and blobs of color in a pickled walnut frame.

One of the other desks could swing out to reveal a complete bar, and that's the time, when Quinlan was there, it was swung out.

Jim looked at the photograph on Quinlan's desk. All the other desks had photographs on their desks, except Jim's father, who had this painting on the wall. Quinlan's was of two boys, one in ten years and one a kid about fourteen with big ears. The younger one had come to the office one day. He went to Andover and lived with his mother, who was divorced from Quinlan, and called his father by his first name, Phil. Jim looked at the big-eared boy in the picture and felt so sorry for him he wanted to cry. But maybe that was crazy. Maybe the kid felt fine.

"Hello," he said into the phone. "I'd like to speak to Miss Gorman." Miss Gorman. He didn't know any "Miss Gorman." She came on then. "Hello," he said. "Libby?"

There was a pause. "Hello." She murmured something away from the phone. "Hello, just a minute."

He should have waited till he got home. He should have called her at her house. He should have thought about it. You couldn't just barge in like this when she was working, after three weeks.

"Hello," she said again. "I was taking dictation from my father. I'm alone now."

"Oh, I didn't know you knew shorthand."

"Didn't you?"

"No, I didn't."

He began to sweat. Jeez, it was only three weeks. What did he used to say to her when he called her three weeks ago?

"Was there something you wanted?" she asked him.

"Well, Yes, there was. Wick's in town. You remember Wick? Remember Wick. She had only seen him about twenty times, whenever she came up to Dartmouth, whenever he brought Wick home for a holiday. "Well, he's in the Coast Guard now and he's got a three-day pass. He thought we might all go out some place tonight, if you could get a girl for him. How about Marge Nicholas? I think Wick would like Marge."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm busy tonight."

"Oh, no, no," he murmured. "I'm sure you can find a date. You're a big man. You're a really big boy. You're a really big boy. I'm really sorry about Wick. I really am. But I'm sure you can get some other girl to get him a date. I'm sure—" The receiver was silent for a second. "Why don't you try me again some time when you have a friend to entertain?" The receiver made a faint click in his ear.

Jim shoved the telephone away and took his feet off the desk. Goddam, he thought. Goddam. Everything was loused up. What was he going to tell Wick now? He lived thirty miles from New York City, but he couldn't get any girls—he couldn't get a date for his roommate who was on a three-day pass. Goddam. If it hadn't been for his father shooting his mouth off about Hallie . . . The son of a bitch, he thought.

He pushed himself out of the chair and tore open the door. Hallie was dictating to a stenographer. "You can come back later," he said. "I have some urgent business to discuss with Miss Breed."

"That's fine," Hallie said when the girl had gone. "That's great. Urgent business. The story of grapefruit from Burbank to Sunkist? What are you trying to do, Jim? The whole office will be jumping with this in fifteen minutes."

"Listen," he said. "Listen. To hell with all that. Let's get married. I'll quit college and stay on here and you can keep your job. You'd need it, anyhow, when I'm drafted."

She leaned back in her chair and looked up at him. "That's a hell of a proposal, lamb."

Kapaho was a good camp for the councilors. Once every two weeks, after the children had gone home, there was a party for the councilors and their friends, a swim in the pool and then a cookout. If the Rat had had any luck in the market, he would have provided steak. There would be hot dogs first, so that by the time the steak came around, nobody noticed that the steak

not the same. They all sat around the campfire for some time.

One time, Ann invited Bill. She thought he'd come because he was good at things like cookouts. He knew all about everything about any kind of camping. He was an Eagle Scout.

It didn't work out, somehow. Ann thought everybody was really nice to him, but he was funny about them.

"That woman," he said. "What's the matter with her? She acts like I'm poison or something."

"Wilma? What are you talking about? She was as sweet as anything. She's a wonderful person."

"Yeah? Did you hear her keep calling me 'little boy'?"

"Oh, Bill, that's just her way. She talks to everybody like that. She's sort of—I don't know—gruff, even to the kids. But she's wonderful when you know her."

"Maybe," Bill said.

They were sitting alone, back from the fire a little. The others were singing the kind of song you sang around a campfire, "Long Long Trail" and "Shine on, Harvest Moon," and "In the Evening," all those old ones. Even Wilma looked broody, Ann thought, the way a fire makes you.

"It's not the same," Bill said.

She looked at him. He had his knees up, his arms across them, and his chin down on his knees. In the firelight the big bones of his face were softened and his cheeks looked smooth and full. Bill, she thought, and wanted to stroke his cheek, but it was not a thing she would ever do with Bill. What he had said seemed to make no sense and she asked him:

"What isn't the same?" But she knew what he meant.

"Nothing," he said. "I don't know. Us."

"Us?"

"This was supposed to be such a good summer. All we do is fight all the time."

"We always did."

"Not like this. Not as if—I don't know. It isn't only that."

"What is it, then?"

He rubbed his eyes nervously about his eyes. "Did you know he was a fellow like Walter? How did he get in?"

He did not wait for her to tell him. "When you were here before, you didn't know I was living."

She laughed a little. "Gerhardt? Don't be a dope, Bill. It's strange here and lonely. I just try to be nice to him, that's all."

"You told me he asked you for a date."

"Well, there's no law against that." She lay back in the grass with her arms under her head and her knees up. If she'd had a skirt on, she'd have had to keep her legs flat on the ground. There was really no sense to skirts when you thought of it. They ought to change the fashion. "Anybody can ask me for a date," she said. She felt better now, not like before. This was familiar. It had nothing to do with the strangeness that was in her this summer, the fears that woke her at night. Bill had always worried about other fellows. "I didn't go with him, did I?"

"You didn't tell him you were going steady, either. He'll ask you again."

"I tried to tell him. He didn't understand it. He thought I meant I was engaged, and when I said I wasn't, he didn't get it. After all, he's a foreigner. But even if he asks me again, I don't have to go, do I? He'll catch on after a while."

Bill picked up a twig and began breaking it up between his hands. "I wish we were engaged," he said. "I could go in the army now. I could enlist, and they'd take me. But if I wanted to get engaged, everybody'd laugh."

Ann said nothing. After a few minutes, Bill said, "I thought we were going to have a good summer anyhow."

"We are," Ann said. "Why shouldn't we?"

Several of the councilors didn't have guests at the next cookout at Wilma's for one.

"Is your little boy coming to the shindig tonight?" she asked Ann in the afternoon.

"I'm not sure."

"Well, if he doesn't, how about spending the night with me?"

My room for a week and her empty bed looks kind of queer in the middle of the night."

Wilma lived with a girl who was a dental hygienist. They had a small room apartment near the school where Wilma taught in the winter. "She looks and acts like a bird brain," Wilma had told Ann, "but she's one smart little cookie. She can do anything from speaking three languages to baking a chocolate cake like in the picture books. Now she wants to go and waste all that talent on the silly goop she works for."

"You mean she's going to marry him?"

Wilma had laughed. "You ought to see him. He comes up to my chin and he has a bald spot and one of those toothbrush moustaches. Even when he's away from his office, he smells like that stuff they use to swab out a cavity just before they fill it."

Ann thought she had a marvelous sense of humor. She was a wonderful person all around. It was pretty flattering that she liked Ann enough to want her to spend the night with her. She could have Bill to another cookout, but Wilma might not be alone again.

It was too hot for activities that afternoon. As soon as rest hour was over, Wilma and Ann herded the children into the pool and kept them going in and out until the buses came.

Gerhardt had made fine progress with them. Almost all of them could swim now except one fat little girl, short for her age, with pudgy arms and legs that she flailed frantically the minute she got in the water.

"She should float so easily, the way she is made," Gerhardt said. "Like a cork. But she is so frightened. I speak to her and tell her I will not let her go, and still she has this fear." He spoke to Wilma, looking at the child who sat away from the pool now, hugging her knees and shivering in the ninety-degree heat. "It would be better, I think, not to force this any more. Perhaps later on, when she is a little older—"

"Ha!" Wilma said. "Don't be silly. Her mother says she's got to learn how to swim before the summer's over. She says all the other children in the group are learning, and her child is just

as she said, "The Rat never changes his mind." She called across the pool to the child. "Hey, Millie, come here a minute."

"Her name is not Millie," Gerhardt said. "It is Barbara."

"I know. This is one of our foolish American jokes. We call certain people Mac or Bub or Susie or Millie, even when it isn't their name, and we find it amusing."

Ann swam slowly down the pool toward them. Wilma had that sort of jeering note in her voice that she often had when she talked to Gerhardt. There was some antagonism between them that Ann did not understand.

"Yes," Gerhardt said. "I see."

Ann pulled herself out of the pool and stood with the water dripping from her fuchsia bathing suit, watching the little fat girl trotting across to Wilma.

"Hi, Barbara," she said softly. "How's everything?"

The child stopped and looked up at her. She grinned. "Oh, Ann," she said, "you look just like a melting Popsicle."

"Ha!" Wilma said. "Did you hear that? Now 'who cares if she can swim or not? I'll bet the silly old so-and-so who wheeled her doesn't even know she has an imagination." The counselor stretched out her hand to the child. "Come here, butterball."

Barbara smiled at the name and slipped her hand into Wilma's. She stood with her feet apart, waiting, looking sturdy. Her eyes, though, were shy and wary.

"Do you think you're going to learn to swim soon?" Wilma asked her.

The child lowered her head. "I don't know," she murmured.

"Well, I think you are. You look just about on the edge of it."

learning to swim. But when the very next time you try, you'll be able to."

Barbara's head shot up, and her hand tightened around Wilma's. "I don't want him to let me go. I'll sink."

"Nobody's going to let you go. Not until you say so. Not if you never swim by yourself."

"My daddy said they threw him in the water and he had to swim."

"But we never do that here. That might frighten you, and we'd much rather you didn't learn to swim at all than have us frighten you. I'll tell you what—" Wilma got to her feet, still holding the child's hand. "You take me in the pool and show me what you want me to do to help you, and I'll do it, exactly as you say."

Ann sat next to Gerhardt at the edge of the pool. "Isn't she marvelous?" she said.

"She is a most remarkable woman."

"I wasn't sure you thought so. Sometimes you don't seem to like her very much."

"Many things about her I do like very much. It is she who does not like me."

"I don't see why."

He smiled. "I am very glad. I was afraid you understood quite well why someone would not like me."

In the pool, Wilma had her arm around the fat little girl's stomach while the child kicked and splashed.

"Don't work so hard," Wilma said. "I'm holding you. Take it easy."

Barbara's frantic gyrations slowed a little. "Is that better? Don't let go!"

"I promised you I wouldn't. I never break a promise. You're doing fine. Feel how light you are?"

"You could hold me by my bathing suit now. But don't let go."

Gerhardt went to work with some of the other children, and then came back to sit with Ann while they practiced what he had taught them.

"All this time," he said, "I thought you were scared and that's why you left the pool. You were just a little girl. Why should she be so afraid?"

"I don't know," Ann said. "Kids are funny. My brother used to be scared every time my mother went out that she was never coming back again. He used to yell and scream when she left. I was only about four, but I remember it."

"And you were not afraid?"

"I don't think so," Ann said. "I guess I knew she'd be back."

Wilma lifted Barbara out of the pool and hoisted herself up beside her. "That was wonderful," Wilma said. "I'm going to call up your mother and tell her how well you're doing."

The child's eyes shone. "Yes, and tell her maybe tomorrow I'll let you let go."

She ran back to the grass where some of the other children were playing, and Wilma lay down flat beside the pool. "She'll swim," she said. "It may take another couple of weeks, but she'll do it."

"I appreciate this," Gerhard said.

Wilma turned her head toward him. "I'm doing it for the kid, so she doesn't have to have another failure." She looked up at the sky. "God knows how many she's had already, trying to be what her mother wants."

"You are very bitter about mothers," Gerhard said. "They are not all so bad."

"Oh, sure, I know. M-O-T-H-E-R spells Mother, a boy's best pal. Only when you see what most of 'em do to their kids, even when they mean well . . ." She sat up and turned to Ann. "You'd better get back in the pool, Popsicle. They're getting restless."

Ann had a much better time at the cookout that night. No one here was part of her life at home. She didn't have to worry or wonder about any of them. There was nobody to guess that everything was changing. When she was with Bill, she kept wanting to be the way she always had been, but sooner or later she had to spoil things and she didn't know why.

For instance, the Saturday night before, when Bill had taken her to the country club dance. He had looked awfully handsome in his new dinner jacket, as black as he was from his long hard job, and they had danced together as they always did, practically as if they were one person. Everything was the same at first even to where her mother asked her why she didn't circulate a little dance with some of the other boys, and she had to explain all over again that when you were going steady you didn't dance with any other boys.

"That's insane," her mother said. "Even married people dance with someone besides their own husbands and wives. What is this, some kind of cult of boredom you youngsters are trying out?"

Her father danced with her once, when the orchestra played a Charleston. "I used to be pretty good at this," he said. "It's funny how all these things are being revived from my time, the dances and the old songs, as if nobody can think of anything new any more."

He wasn't a bad dancer for a man his age, though Ann thought he looked better doing the thumba than the Charleston.

"I was watching you and Bill dancing your version of a fox-trot before," he said. "The way you were all but standing still, swaying to the music with your arms around each other, reminded me of the marathon dances they used to have when I was a kid. That was the way the couples danced at the end, barely moving, out on their feet. Sometimes one of the pair would be so exhausted, or even actually asleep, that his partner would have to drag him around the floor. We'd see it in the newsreels, somebody collapsing, somebody being carried out on a stretcher, days of it, weeks, until there was only one couple left."

"It sounds crazy," Ann said.

"It was. We were a crazy bunch." He smiled at her. "I think you kids were supposed to be our parents, but something got twisted around."

She didn't know what he meant, but she thought he'd better stop talking so much. The Charleston was a strenuous dance.

and she had been dancing with her mother. She had a
number, she said, and the crowd gave her the number in
the morning. She was glad when the number was over. Bill
who had been dancing with her mother, came back.
"I never know what to say to your mother," he said.

"You're always telling me that."

"Well, it's so. I don't mean I don't like her or anything. But
like just now she asked me why I did the Charleston dance.
She said nobody ever took it so seriously in the twenties. What
was I supposed to say to that?"

"I don't know," Ann said. "You certainly seem to have
been getting along with people. Wilma, my mother—I should
think by the time a person is out of high school, he ought to
know what to say."

He looked down at her without speaking, just shrugging his
shoulders a little, and she wished she could take it back. She
had never talked to Bill that way before. She didn't know what
had got into her. Always before she had been on his side. No
matter how she tried the rest of the evening, nothing seemed to
go right any more.

He wouldn't have enjoyed the cookout anyhow. He wouldn't
have liked the way Gerry hung around her all evening. She
couldn't very well tell him not to, because she'd have hurt his
feelings. With an American boy, it was different. All she'd have
to say was that she was going steady and he'd understand and
know there was nothing personal in it. But Gerry thought as
long as you weren't engaged, any fellow had a clear field. So
he couldn't keep trying to set him straight on it.

"You're not supposed to do this," she said, when he brought
her a paper plate loaded with food. "At a cookout, it's every man
for himself, and that means girls too."

He sat down beside her with his own plate. He had filled out
a lot since she had first seen him, and he was as tanned and
healthy-looking as any of them now. She thought he seemed
foreign, too, though she couldn't have said why.

"I think you like it better to sit still and be a lady," he said.

"Why should you take advantage of your sex if you can?"

"Maybe," he said. "I like you a lot. You're a little bit of a charmer, but favored by the outdoors. I like you. This is divine."

He smiled at her. "You are charming."

Thinking, she thought No one had ever called her that before. She felt charming. "I'm afraid you're a wolf," she said. She looked at him. "You know what a wolf is?"

"Yes, I know," he said solemnly. "But I am not one. I am only a timid young man who is not sure of himself at all with an American girl." He laughed. "I think perhaps I would like to be a wolf."

She laughed too. "Some people are sure you are one."

"If I were, I would know how to ask you if I may drive you home tonight. I have my sister's car."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." She laid her hand briefly on his arm and was startled at the feel of it, hairy and sort of tough, so different from Bill's. "Wilma asked me to spend the night with her."

He stared down at the arm she had touched. His jaws worked as if he were chewing, but she didn't think he was chewing any more. "Please do not go," he said in a low voice.

"Get, Gerry, I have to go. I told her I would. Her roommate's away and she's all alone."

"She is surely able to be alone, a great grown woman."

"Yes, but I want to go, Gerry. I mean, I'd love to drive home with you, but maybe we can do that some other time. Tonight I promised Wilma, and I want to go."

"I do not think you should."

He sounded like Bill, stubborn and unreasonable. She guessed he was pretty crazy about her. But even if there hadn't been Bill, he was too old for her. He was a man. In Europe she guessed girls went with much older fellows. Often they were married at her age, and their husbands were more like their fathers. Ann couldn't see that at all.

"Don't be silly, Gerry," she said.

He turned to the group of men and women who were standing behind him. The director of the show, Mr. Ratman, was standing next to him. Then, she caught Ann's eye she smiled and saluted her with her hands on her haunches. She could stay that way for hours, Mr. Ratman.

"How about a camp song, everybody?" She winked at Ann. "How about, 'We're Going Back to Rapaho?' Mr. Ratman, won't you lead us?"

The director gave a pleased look around, murmuring "oh yes" until several hands pushed him and there was a chorus of, "Come on, Mr. Ratman." Then he got to his feet, still holding his plate with a bitten crescent of bread on it. He started to sing, his hands, noticed the plate, giggled, and threw it into the air, and then frowned.

"Well, all right," he said sternly. "Make it loud and clear, now." He lifted one hand and gave them the first note, dragging it out, "We-e-e-re . . ."

"We're going back to Rapaho," everyone sang heartily,
"Back where we belong.

To its hills and "water
Each son and daughter
Raises up this song."

"We're going back to Rapaho;
Been away too long.
Now the time is nearing
To join the cheering
Of our happy throng.

"Rapaho-ho-ho! Rapaho-ho-ho! Ra-a-a-äpaho!"

The last part was a cheer, and in order to lead it, Mr. Ratman got down on one knee, balled his hands into fists, and waved his arms violently. Ann followed along with enthusiasm. "It's a pretty good place when you thought about it."

hopeful. "That's all right," she said. "It was nice to sit around the fire. I hope you had a good time. You know, the Rat was okay when you got to know him."

"Ho-ho-ho!" she yelled, accentuating each "ho" with a head nod. Then she saw Wilma looking at her across the fire and she grinned back and exaggerated the head nod and raised her voice.

"That's that," she said to Gerhardt when it was over. "Dee-ah-Rapaho!" She laughed. "I thought the Rat was going to explode."

"It does not seem to me funny," he said, "to make a joke of someone this way."

For a minute she was angry, annoyed with him for being so stuffy, but then she remembered that after all he couldn't be expected to understand.

"Well," she said "that's American humor. We think it's funny."

"You speak like Wilma," he said. Then he laughed. "'Rapaho-ho-ho.' It is very silly. Yet perhaps this is better, this kind of silliness, than to scoff at everything."

"Let's not be philosophical," Ann said. "It's too nice a night. He laughed again. "All right. We will not be philosophical."

One of the old councilors asked Wilma to sing, and some of the others took it up. Someone yelled, "Sing 'Sleepy-Time Galf'." Everybody applauded, and Wilma squatted in front of the fire and began singing in a low-pitched, husky voice with an insinuating rhythm.

"Sleepy-time gal,

You're tummin' night into day. . . ."

She looked into the fire as she sang. Once she raised her eyes and looked steadily at Ann, smiled a little, and looked back at the fire.

"I don't know she could sing," Ann whispered to Gerhardt. "She's terrific."

Gerhardt said something, but Ann did not know what it was.

The way Wilma sang gave her a feeling of freedom. She was as free as a bird. She couldn't really compare her with any other girl, but Ann couldn't think of any girl to compare her with. She did not sing like any girl Ann had ever heard. She was terrible. After "Sleepy-Time Gal," she sang, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," and then "Bali H'ai." Then she got up and said, "It's getting late, and she came around the fire and took Ann's hand and said, "Come on, Popsicle. Time to go home."

Gerhardt stood up. "Ann," he said, "you told me I would drive you home." He looked into her eyes. "Is this not so?" Talk about American fellows being persistent, she thought. "You must have misunderstood me," she said. "I'm spending the night with Wilma."

She and Wilma went hand in hand to the parking lot and got into the five-year-old Chevy coupe that Wilma kept as carefully cleaned and polished as if it were new. Wilma was still humming Bali H'ai, and she did not speak until they were on the road.

"That Weber," she said. "Is he annoying you?"

Ann frowned. "No. He's all right."

"I still don't trust him. I don't think you should either. I don't think you should go out alone with him."

"My goodness, why does everyone want to take care of me? I'm almost eighteen," Ann said. "Anyhow, I'm not going out alone with him. You forget Bill."

"Oh, that little boy," Wilma said. "You can't be serious about him. He could almost be your child."

"He's older than I am. Three months older."

Wilma laughed. "You're cute," she said. She squeezed Ann's hand and then began to sing again, driving fast along the back road, so fast that Ann, who liked speed, was a little nervous.

"It's all right," Wilma said. "I've never had an accident in my life."

"I didn't say anything."

"You don't have to. I can feel your tension." She smiled. "Relax. Sing with me."

"No, I love to sing. You sing. I love to listen."

She had been so busy that day that she had not had time to go back again to the store and listened to the low-pitched voice. She had been busy about to be going with Wilma tonight instead of tomorrow. She didn't know what was going on at home. The F.B.I. men had been around again, questioning her mother, and Ann couldn't tell whether anything had come out about Mrs. Dellett or not. For a while she had decided that it wouldn't because it had nothing to do with Lex, but then she had figured out that Mrs. Dellett must be a Communist, and the F.B.I. would have to check up on her friendship with Ann's father because he was so close to Lex. Whether or not Mr. Nye had started on it yet, she didn't know. Everybody seemed upset about something. Her father and Jim hardly spoke to each other and her mother kept getting headaches. It was terrible not knowing, waiting for something to happen.

"Here we are," Wilma said. "It's a little on the crummy side, but there are those who love it."

The apartment house was old and the halls smelled musty, but Wilma's place, one floor up, was like her car, polished clean. The furniture was large and plain, slipcovered in fresh-colored striped cotton. Wilma slept on a studio couch in the living room. The bedroom, which was fussier than the rest of the apartment, with a blue ruffled bedspread and matching lampshades on the dressing table, was given over to her roommate.

"She has to have all the trimmings," Wilma said. "Me, as long as it's clean and there's a good bed and a place to hang my hat, I'm satisfied. Go on in and make yourself comfortable. Peggy's stuff should fit you all right."

All Ann could find was a nightgown and a flower-sprigged brunch coat. She had never worn a nightgown in her life, but she put it on. The coat was a little tight across the shoulders so she left it open.

When she went back into the living room, Wilma was in black lounge pajamas with a red jacket. She had highballs ready on a tray with a plate of crackers.

Ann had never had a highball. Sometimes at home she had a liquor cocktail, good and sweet, but she didn't like the way liquor much. She didn't like the way her parents were drinking. Her father's eyes got funny after a couple of cocktails and her mother talked too fast, and she didn't see why she wanted to get like that. She was never going to. But of course she had to be polite and drink Wilma's highball.

She sat down on the sofa, holding the glass. Now that she was here she felt a little strange. Wilma looked different in her camp clothes, older. It was almost like all the other uncomfortable times when she sat in a room with an adult and didn't know what to say.

"Let's have some music." Wilma got up and turned on the radio. "WQXR. I don't really like that kind of music, but it's a good background, less distracting than something you can hear." She stood looking down at Ann on the sofa. "You have beautiful eyes, Ann. I suppose you've been told that. Don't blush," she laughed. "Nothing I say to you should make you blush. We're friends." She sat down next to Ann and put her hand on her knee. "I'll tell you what your eyes remind me of--some pretty eyes I had when I was little. My grandmother rubbed them in her dress and then picked up a scrap of paper with them to show me they were real. She was a good old gal, but she died when I was ten."

Ann took a little sip of her drink, careful not to move her finger. She didn't want Wilma to think she was trying to get away from her hand. It felt uncomfortably warm through the nylon nightgown, but she didn't want to hurt Wilma's feelings. "One of my grandmothers is still alive; my mother's mother," she said. "She lives in Framington with one of my uncles. I usually see them Christmas."

Wilma grinned at her. "What's the matter with you?"

You know what the matter was. I just said, 'This is me. This is my life.'"

Ann didn't know what the matter was. She had been thinking about it, but she was glad she didn't have to go home, and now she was home, in her own room. It was crazy, but she was home sometimes. Adolescent, she guessed.

Wilma grinned back. "FL," she said, and thought it came out normal.

Wilma moved away to a corner of the couch. Ann felt better immediately with her knee free. She had been getting a cramp.

"How did you like the Rat at the campfire tonight?" Wilma asked. "Didn't he put on a show? Rapaho-ho-ho." She began to laugh. "I thought I'd burst, trying to be serious."

"Me too," Ann put her glass down. "I can't finish this, do you mind? I'm not much on drinking." She settled her bare feet under her on the sofa. "Gerry didn't get the joke, though. He thought it wasn't nice to make fun of the Rat. He certainly doesn't understand American humor very well."

"I don't know. He could be right. Maybe the Rat's got a sensitive soul hidden away somewhere. Maybe he isn't just a crummy little guy living off a lot of crummy mothers who can't stand their kids around." She reached for Ann's glass. "Here. Let me get you a coke."

When she came back from the kitchen, Ann said, "I don't think mothers always send their kids to camp because they can't stand them around. I wanted to go to camp. I think my parents kept me because they thought it would be good for me."

"That's what they all tell themselves," Wilma sat cross-legged on the floor at Ann's feet. "Your mother may be different. She's probably is, or you wouldn't have turned out so well."

"I'll be a wonderful mother," Ann said. "I've never seen anyone so marvelous with kids."

"Turn that damn radio to another station, will you, Ann?" Wilma said. "Or turn it off altogether. We've got enough music for one night. We're going back to bed."

Rapport. That's what we have to have. We have to be able to sit down and tell the other about yourself. Who ever heard of two girls spending the night together without any confidences?"

Later, lying in bed in Peggy's room, Ann tried to remember what she had said, but there was too much to remember. She had never talked like that before. She thought it must have been that half a highball, because she had felt sort of sort of dizzy and far off. At first when Wilma had asked her to tell her about herself, she hadn't known what to say. You never did when anyone asked you that. But then Wilma had begun, and before you knew it Ann was telling her things she had never told anyone in her life.

She couldn't remember everything Wilma had said either. Only that she hadn't had a happy childhood and that she didn't get along well with men because she was too rail. She was lonely, Ann thought. It was funny to think of anyone that wonderful having to be lonely. She spent most of her time with children. She insisted that she didn't especially like children, just felt sorry for them, but Ann was sure she really did like them or she couldn't have been so good with them.

"If Peggy marries her dentist," she had said, "I'll probably start talking baby talk to myself when I'm alone here at night."

She made it seem as if it were all a joke, but Ann knew it was not a joke.

"I think you and I could be great friends, Ann," she said. "We have a lot to give each other. Maybe you can help me to believe in something again, and I can help you not to believe in too much."

Ann told her about Bill. "I feel—I don't know—easy with him, though there was nothing I couldn't talk to him about. Sometimes we don't talk at all, and that's okay too. We understand everything about each other." She stopped, not really wanting to say the rest of it and yet feeling that she had to, that she couldn't keep anything back from Wilma. "At least that's how it's been until just lately. Now it's—I don't know—different. As

if something was going to be wrong between us. I don't want anything to happen. I feel terrible about it. I'm not going away for a long time, and this may be the last summer when everything would be just the same."

Ann was sorry now that she had told this last to Wilma. Putting those words made it seem worse, more real. She was even sorry in a way that she had talked about her feeling for him. A feeling changed when you talked about it. It wasn't only between two people any more. Something went out of it. That was what her mother and most other adults didn't seem to understand—that you had to keep some things just for yourself, or you'd spoil them.

It had been different with Wilma. Ann had wanted to tell her at the time, had felt a need to tell her. They had been sitting in the dark with the radio tuned down low and everything else quiet. A kind of sorrow for Wilma had come over her, and she had wanted to help her to be happy. They had seemed very close, sitting there together. All at once Ann had wanted Wilma to know everything about her.

"You don't really care for Bill," Wilma had said. "You're just used to him. It's so easy to be fooled. Ann, into lifetime misery. There can be so much ugliness in a man's love, so much harshness and cruelty."

"Bill's not like that," Ann said.

"He's only a boy now, a child. They change. 'Each one kills the thing he loves.' That was written by a man about men. Women are tender and protective toward what they love, but men can be brutal. In some circles they beat their women. In others they ignore them or make love to someone else. Some do it with a kiss, some with a sword, but it's all the same."

Ann thought of her father—of her father and Mrs. Deller. She thought of her mother. When you said, "it would kill her if she knew," you didn't mean it literally. She didn't suppose the writer Wilma was talking about meant it literally either. Each one kills the thing he loves.

"Isn't everybody's like that," she said. "No, all men."

"O-

Ann looked at Wilma not looking again.

Ann had to, her back was so straight and strong. She had had that one drink, and then she had sat there with her hands crossed and her hands on her knees, talking in her deep, low voice, just sitting there and talking and listening to Ann. It had been as though everybody else in the world were asleep.

"Don't think I'm down on love," she had said. "Nothing is worth living for. Most people don't know how to love, but they don't love enough."

"My aunt said something like that once."

Ann didn't know how long they had talked. Wilma had patted her off to bed finally. She had kissed her goodnight, which surprised Ann, because she wouldn't have thought Wilma was the kissing kind. And now here she was in this bed that was softer than her own but a little lumpy, and she couldn't sleep. She felt all keyed up and at the same time depressed. That was adolescence too, she supposed--what her mother called the manic-depressive teens. If you understood about its just being your age, it wasn't supposed to bother you so much.

Finally she did fall asleep, and awoke with the feeling that she was being strangled. She tried to sit up and couldn't, and then she realized that Wilma was lying next to her on the bed with her arms around her.

"Hey!" Ann said.

Wilma stirred and moved her arms and Ann wrenched herself away and out of the bed. She stood in the middle of the room, half asleep, and said, "Hey!" again, angrily.

Wilma sat up. "Ann," she said, "what's the matter? You're startled? It's all right. You must have had a nightmare. You were yelling your head off and I came in to quiet you. You fell asleep here." She held out her hand. "It's all right. Come on back."

Ann looked around the dark room. "I can't sleep."

body. "I'm not going to sleep," she said. "I might just as well go."

"It's four o'clock in the morning," she said. "You can't go anywhere anyway. We'll go right to camp together tomorrow." She sounded annoyed, but then she got out of the bed and her face got gentler. "Go on back to sleep," she said. "I'm not bothering you."

When Ann got home the next evening, Mr. Nye was in bed again with her mother. The house was quiet. Lex had gone to New York for a few days and Aunt Marcia, Rena told her, was at the hairdresser.

"She was getting real gray at the roots. She asked me this morning if it looked bad and I said it did," Rena laughed. "She liked that. Said she was glad to find her an honest woman."

"Did Bill call?" Ann asked automatically.

"Not yet. Oh, but that French one did, though. He called about five minutes ago and wanted to know if you was home yet. He's going to call back later."

"He's Austrian," Ann said. "I've told you that a million times."

"What's the difference? Austrian--French. They're all foreigners."

Ann took a long shower and got into clean shorts and a sleeveless shirt. Her hair looked straggly--it always did unless she put it every night--so she brushed it back straight into a neat horsetail, and tied a ribbon around it. She felt so clean and neat that she didn't even want to powder her nose. She just put on a little lipstick.

When she heard her aunt come in she ran downstairs. "Hi," she said. "Let's see how it looks."

Aunt had on a pink cotton dress. It wasn't exactly the right size for anyone her size, but it looked good with her eyes and hair. Her hair looked fine. You wouldn't have any way now of telling it was dyed, except that most people that age didn't have black hair.

"Well," she said, "They did a good job."

Her aunt smiled. "I just stayed at this girl's apartment. She was alone. It wasn't very exciting."

"Where's your mother?"

"Mr. Nye's here."

"Oh, Lord. Again?" She started to go upstairs and then turned around. "Want to come up with me for a few minutes?"

"Okay," Ann said.

Her aunt's room was always terribly sloppy, much worse than Ann had ever kept her room. Rena straightened up some of it when she cleaned it, but nobody could really do it all. She always had stuff all over the bed, books and stockings and packages of cigarettes and those little extra pillows that she called baby pillows. What wasn't on the bed was on the dresser. Half the time she didn't even bother putting her jewelry away, and some of it was really good, stuff her second husband had given her. He had said Aunt Marcia a lot of alimony. Aunt Marcia always said she had taken all she could get so he'd have less to spend on liquor.

Ann couldn't see any place to sit. "Just shove that book on the floor and sit on the chair," her aunt said. "It's a lousy book anyway—all full of rotten, weak, hopeless people in a world that's going to pot."

There was something to be said, Ann thought, for a room where you could throw things on the floor. She sat in the chair and her aunt made room on the bed and lay down. Ann's mother said Aunt Marcia threw herself whole-heartedly into everything, even resting.

"I like to read about nice people, don't you?" her aunt said. "I think most people are nice, if you can peel off enough layers to get down to it. And I don't believe everybody's brooding and complaining about the state of the world either. The world's been in worse states and got out of it. I think most people just wait

on about the situation, don't you? Even when bombs fall on them, they don't get mad in the war.

Ann could remember even the beginning of the war though she was then only four. She could remember waking up early in the morning and hearing the radio on and everybody sitting in the living-room in their pajamas, listening to Chamberlain. Of course she couldn't remember what he had said. She didn't even know at the time that it was Chamberlain.

Later on, when it seemed as though the German bombers might come, they had had buckets of sand around the house and a stirrup pump to put out fires. Her father had fixed up a shelter out of an old table, and they had all practiced getting under it in a hurry. She and Jim had huddled together, and giggled, but Jim had been trembling too. After a while, when it didn't seem as though the Germans were going to come after all, it had become as much of a game to him as it was to her. Their father was an air raid warden, and every time they saw him in his helmet they had to laugh at how funny he looked.

Ann smiled. "Do you think Gromvko's nice?"

"I'm sure he has his points. Maybe he's good to his family. Maybe he's charming dinner company. I don't know. He stands for something we have and know is wrong, but he probably thinks it's right. That makes him more a fool than a rogue, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I guess so." Alin thought a minute. "You mean if somebody does something bad because he thinks it's right, he isn't really a bad person?"

Her aunt turned on her side and looked at her. "Is that a new idea to you?" She reached for a cigarette and lit it and then held it in the corner of her mouth, puffing at it without taking it out. "What do you kids talk about, anyway? When you get together, I mean. What do you discuss?"

Ann wondered how anybody was supposed to answer questions like that. "What do you discuss? It was like asking, What do you think about? As if you could rectify it like something in a

"I don't know," she said.

"You're the funny one. Ann couldn't understand why the cigarette didn't choke her or get in her eyes. She talked too much. I guess we thought if we kept on talking we'd find the answer to everything."

She stopped, listening to the sound of a car in the driveway and wondered if she was listening for Lex, who had driven his convertible into New York and would be back some time tomorrow. It was Jim's car, though. He always raced the motor for a minute when he stopped, to fill the line with gas or something.

"I'll tell you," her aunt went on. "Sometimes it's as dangerous to be a fool as a rogue."

The telephone rang, and Rena yelled up to Ann that the French fellow was on the wire.

"You can take it here if it isn't private," her aunt said.

Ann would rather have taken it downstairs, but she couldn't. She went and sat on the chaise, sinking further back than she expected into more of her aunt's baby pillows, so that her knees fell into an awkward position almost under her chin.

"Ann?" he said. "Gerry here." It sounded so funny, the American nickname and the foreign expression. "What has happened? Why were you not at camp? Wilma said you were not well."

"I'm fine."

"Then why—? No. Please." He paused and then added more politely, "I would like very much to see you tonight. May I not come?"

She didn't want to see him. She didn't want to see him or him or anyone. She just wanted to stay home.

"If you have a date," Gerhardt said, "I could come before. Or later, if you wish. Any time you say."

"My goodness," she said, "it must be important." When he didn't answer, she said, "I can't make it tonight. I'll see you at camp tomorrow."

She pulled herself up out of the chaise to put the phone back on the table, and saw that her aunt was watching her.

from the living room. The swimming instructor. He's Austrian.

"I know he's Austrian. You tell her that," she said, "you mention him."

She stared down at the border of the blue rug, where if you looked at the geometric pattern a certain way you could see the words coming up to beg. "Did you ever hear the saying, 'each man loves the thing he loves'?"

"It sounds familiar. Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. I read it somewhere, and I was wondering what it, that's all."

"I suppose it's true in a way," her aunt said. "If you love someone, you know best how to hurt him."

Aunt looked up at her. "Do you think men do it more than women?"

"Do what?"

"Kill the thing they love?"

Her aunt grinned. "Could be," she said. "But what can we do? We're stuck with them." Her face sobered and she raised herself on her elbows. The flesh strained up over the low neck of her dress, bluish-white against the tan of her face and throat. "Is something wrong, kid? Something with you and Bill, or something? I'm a good listener."

Aunt got up. "Of course not. Everything's fine," she said. "I think I heard Jim come in. I guess I'll go see what he's doing."

She closed the door behind her and went into the bathroom for a drink of water. From the window she could see Jim in the driveway, cleaning his car. He had changed out of his city clothes into his bathing trunks and he was using the hose on the car, and every little while turning it on himself.

She tried to do that all the time, she thought, but she couldn't remember when he'd done it last. Not this summer. She hadn't even seen him wipe his car off this summer, though he used to do that. They all laughed at him. It was good to see him out there. She had a feeling that she wanted to run down

and talk to him. But the door had closed. What if he came to it, you never could say. He would not wait for you.

The study door opened, and her mother came out into the hall with Mr. Nye. He nodded to Ann, said goodnight, and went downstairs. Ann watched his descending back, a little awkward in the dark gray suit, and wondered whether he had a home of some place, and children. She couldn't imagine anybody calling him "daddy."

She kissed her mother, who patted her cheek—she always did that when she hadn't seen Ann in a while—and asked her how long she had been home.

"Did you have a good time?"

"It was okay."

She followed her mother into her room. It was as neat as Marcia's was untidy. If you asked her where anything was, she could tell you exactly. "In the back right hand corner of the second drawer." If anyone had taken it or anything and it wasn't there, she would have a fit. Ann wondered how she and Anna Marcia ever could have lived together. But maybe they had been different then, when they were young.

"Mother, did I ever have nightmares?" Ann asked. "Did I ever yell in my sleep?"

"Nightmares? No. No, not you. Jim was the one. He used to scream for me at all hours." She sat down and stared out the window. "What makes you ask that?"

"Oh, just something with one of the little kids at camp."

She saw that her mother was not listening. She was sitting with one hand on the windowsill and the other fumbling in the pocket of her dress for a cigarette, and Ann noticed now that her face was pale. Something had happened.

"What did he want?" Ann asked.

"Who?"

"Mr. Nye. Why does he keep coming?"

She really did not expect an answer. She thought her mother would put her off some way. But she didn't. All at once it was as if they were two women.

"I don't know," her mother said in a low voice. "He seems to believe in something I could tell him, something I'm holding back. I think he's trying to wear me down. If I could be sure what it was—"

Mrs. Dellett, Ann thought. Mr. Nye thought her mother knew about Mrs. Dellett and her father, and was trying to make her tell sooner or later her mother would understand what he was driving at. Ann wanted to say something or do something, but she didn't know what. She didn't know how to help her mother. She had never had to help her before.

"I guess I'll go out for a while," she mumbled, and escaped down the stairs. Rena saw her go and called to her not to go far because dinner would be ready in a few minutes. As she reached the front walk, Jim came from the driveway, his hair plastered wet against his head and drops of water glistening on his shoulders.

"Where's daddy?" she asked him.

"He didn't come home with me. He's working tonight."

"Does mother know?"

"I guess so. He must have called her. Why?"

She didn't know why, only that she wanted her father home; she wanted her father and mother together. She wished she could talk to Jim, but she couldn't. If what she had told him that night about Mrs. Dellett was what was wrong between him and their father now, she would only make it worse.

"No reason," she said.

He gave a sudden lunge, and put his cold, wet hand down the back of her neck. She squealed and struggled to get free, but he held her, laughing, and in a minute she began to giggle.

"Quit it, Jim!" she gasped. "Jimmie, stop!"

"Jimmie, stop!" he echoed, his voice pitched high and quavering.

It was a long time since he had teased her. She had always hated it. Sometimes she had actually cried with vexation, deprecating herself for doing it, even though that always stopped him. She wasn't crying now, but it wasn't because he was annoyed.

"I can't see you tonight," she told him. "I've got to go to bed."
He didn't say anything for a minute. "Okay," he said at last.
That night. Tonight. Look, Ann, are we still going to bed or
not? Because if we're not--"

"What makes you think we're not? Just because I can't see
you get all--"

"It isn't that," he interrupted. "I don't know. Everything
seems all fouled up."

"Don't be silly," she said

But it was true. Everything did seem all fouled up.

Dinner parties were bad enough in the winter, Zelda thought.
In the summer, they were an abomination. It was pleasant on
the huge, screened-in terrace with its view of the gardens; there
was a nice breeze. But in the soft, lethargic air, dinner time
after was too much of an effort.

The trouble was, really, that she had had only one cocktail
beforehand. Dan Partridge had made some fancy frozen dai-
quiris, assuming that everyone would like them (or not caring if
they didn't) but Zelda couldn't stand rum, and nothing else had
been offered. The Partridges were notably stingy with their
liquor, though they were certainly lavish in other ways. Just one
of those quirks. If you were to let such things annoy you, you
couldn't see anybody.

Anyway, had she had her customary two drinks—or three, if
there was one of those long stretches before you finally sat down
to eat—she'd have been all right now. Everyone seemed char-
ming to her after a couple of cocktails, and she was charming to
them; at least she felt charming, which served the same purpose.
"I didn't catch your name," the man on her left said. He was
short, with a heavy red face and graying hair. Zelda didn't re-
member his name either, but she knew he was on the short
exchange with Dan. He stood out this much for her.

she had seen them at a dinner before. The same people occurred at many of the other dinner parties.

"That's the man who she was, and pointed out Tony to her at the other side of the table. The man sat with a shrimp on his plate, as if trying to decide whether he had said enough to get the right to eat it, and then asked her how she knew the Partridges.

"Oh, the usual thing," she said. "We met them at someone's home up here."

He nodded as though satisfied, and popped the shrimp into his mouth. Zelda looked at Dorothy Partridge at one end of the table and Dan at the other and wondered how, actually, she did know them. She knew how she had met them, but that was not the same thing. How had they ever come to be what was loosely known as friends?

Now that she thought about it, it struck her that she did not particularly like either one of them. Why do we see them? she thought. Or any of the other couples that bore us? You got caught up in it somehow. You met a couple somewhere, and the woman called up later and asked you for dinner or the evening, and you went. There was no way out of it, really, if she was persistent enough, because you could not keep on saying you were busy on every evening she mentioned. Then you had to have them, and there you were. If you really couldn't stand them at all, you could just not reciprocate, of course. But that was always uncomfortable. Sooner or later you would be sure to find yourself sitting next to them at a dinner party.

While she was thinking all this, Zelda was at the same time talking to the red-faced man. It was not difficult. He would eat a few mouthfuls and then ask her if she didn't think it had been a warm summer, or if she had seen Dan's flowers, or if she liked living in the suburbs in the winter. Later she heard him talking quite intelligently to another man about politics, and she wondered whether it was her fault for not drawing him out, or whether he was one of those men who still thought women did not know anything about such things.

The man on her other side turned toward Evan, and he saw him slightly smiling and nodding. He was looking at Evan, and Evan was looking at him all over. Worcester, he said, had moved further up, in a large house near the Sound. They had five children, or maybe it was five.

"Mrs. Halliday," he said, "you look younger every time I see you."

Oh Lord! she thought. She looked at Dorothy, who was laughing happily about her new maid who went off on periodical trips but was such a marvelous cook they all pretended not to notice. You could get an idea of what your friends thought of you by whom they put you next to at dinner. If Dorothy thought she deserved these two, she must either dislike her or think she was as dull as they were.

"How old are your children?" Evan asked her. When she told him, he shook his head. "I can't believe it. That's the great thing, of course, about having your children when you're young. You can really grow up with them."

She said, "I never thought of it in quite that way."

"Take me, now," he said. "My youngest is only five. By the time she's in college, I'll be an old man of sixty. Of course these days even sixty isn't so old."

The maid passed a platter of cold boiled lobsters, lying red and unresisting among the watercress, their savage claws futile.

"What strange things we eat," Zelda said. "I wonder who first had the courage to try anything as dreadful-looking as a lobster."

Evan laughed a little uncertainly. "Look out," he said. "You'll spoil my appetite."

She thought of what he had said before, that even sixty wasn't so old any more. He would probably be turning up next to her at dinner parties for another fifteen or twenty years. There was something to be said for the times when people past fifty had stayed home by the fire.

"How are the schools in your community, Mrs. Halliday?" he asked her.

"Very progressive, I think, for public schools."

Harmon had slid down his nose a little, and he made a gesture as though trying to coax them back, and then pushed them into place with his finger. He had a singularly fleshy nose in contrast with his long, bony face.

"What do you mean, progressive?" he asked.

"She was not interested in the schools any more. Her children were through with them, and so was she. All the years of PTA meetings were over. She supposed some day she would miss them, but it was too soon for that."

"Oh, less strict discipline, more attention to the individual," she said, "more free expression . . ."

Ryan pushed a lobster claw around on his plate. "How free do you think expression should be?" he asked her.

All at once he was not just a stupid little man mouthing clichés at the dinner table. His voice had grown tight and quiet. Something Zelda had heard came back to her faintly now, and she felt her blood stir, released from the touriquet of boredom.

She looked at him and laughed. "I used to hear about a school in the city, a private school, where the children threw bread at each other at the lunch table and nobody stopped them for fear of repressing them too much. I don't think it should be *that* free."

He brushed this aside. "What about the teachers? Do you think they should be allowed to teach whatever they please?"

"Within certain limits, yes. After all, in the public schools there's a syllabus to cover. We can't have a teacher indulging a whim for teaching Etruscan history, say, when there's barely time to cover the prescribed history course. But if it's something extra, some enrichment, I'm all for it."

"Yes, yes, of course. But what if they were to try to slip in a little communism?" He split a lobster claw with a nutcracker. The small explosion of sound coincided with the last word. "You wouldn't want that, would you?"

Harmon was listening to them. All around the table little

pockets of talk and laughter. But the silence was not complete. It was like the tick of a clock in a bedroom. "I'd have to know what you mean by 'slip in,'" she said. "Do you mean suggest it's the hope of the world, or discuss it passionately?"

The side of his mouth that was toward her curved upward in a thin smile. "Those are just words," he said. "I'm a simple man. All I know is that I want my children to learn democracy in school, Americanism. I don't want them exposed to the teachings of the writings of communists." He gave her an odd sideways glance. "Maybe you feel differently."

A stifled feeling seized her. She felt cold, and then angry. He was trying clumsily to trap her into an argument, for no purpose that she could imagine except to find out whether she would give the "right" answers. Gestapo. Politburo. If she were a teacher or a public figure, would she speak out now? It frightened her to think that she might not.

"Maybe I do," she said, as quietly as she could. "Maybe I think they're old enough they ought to hear all about communism, read about it, listen to the claims and promises of communist speakers and writers. They can't fight something they know nothing about. They can't be sure communism isn't the hope of the world unless they know why communists think it is." She turned around in her chair, trying unsuccessfully to make him face her directly. His ear was near her mouth. She felt as though she were making a speech into a microphone. "Have you ever read John Stuart Mill's 'On Liberty?'"

"I told you," he said. "I'm a simple man."

"This is a simple idea. Mill thought it was important to listen to the arguments of those whose ideas were opposed to our own so that from time to time we would be forced to reexamine and confirm our own principles."

"No real American has to re-examine democracy, Mrs. Miller. We know it's good."

There was a subtle accent on the pronoun. He said it as if

classified as "not from the 'we.'" She pretended not to notice.

"We don't have to be afraid to listen to someone who is different, do we?"

The waitress brought finger bowls. Evan dipped into his dish, and patted his moist fingers against his lips. His hands were big and fleshy, matched his nose.

"I'm afraid of anything or anyone that threatens Americanism," he said. "I want them out of the way. I don't want to be exposed to them."

Zelda did not need the finger bowl. She had scarcely touched her lobster. "On the other hand, I'm not at all afraid of being exposed to them," she said. "They can't infect me or my family. I don't believe they can infect any noticeable portion of our citizenry. Not as long as we don't pull down any Iron Curtain, as if we feared a comparison between their system and ours. Let them fear it. I welcome it." She gave him a bland smile, hoping he could see it out of the corner of his eye. "Apparently I am firmer in the faith than you are, Mr. Evan."

If she had made him angry, he did not show it. He sat back in his chair, his napkin laid neatly across his knees.

"I'm not willing to take chances with the future of my country. For getting rid of whatever may poison the minds of its people, particularly its children. Get rid of them all, I say, whatever isn't truly American. Teachers, movies, books."

"Books," Zelda repeated. "What would you do with the books?"

She did not wait for him to answer, but turned and began talking animatedly to the little red faced man about the advantages of living in the suburbs despite the evils of commuting. Dinner table topic No. 97, for city visitors.

She had had enough of Mr. Evan. She remembered all about him now. He and some other private citizens in his town had formed themselves into a vigilante committee to investigate communist activities in the community schools. They had demanded the resignation of two teachers—on what specific charges Zelda

could not remember, but the story had been officially cleared up and they had found a book which was wanted removed from the school libraries. An investigation of these books had turned up only one that had any dangerous contents--a book written by an avowed communist. It was a gloriously romantic story about a hero of the Revolutionary War.

Zelda recalled that for almost a year, Mr. Evan and his associates had threatened and frightened the community, until the PTA and the Board of Education held an open meeting in the town hall at which the charges were all publicly disproved and the self-appointed committee virtually thrown out of court.

But Mr. Evan was still trying. If the occasion ever arose, Zelda was sure he would denounce her as a communist. He had to denounce somebody. A frightened man can be dangerous, she thought.

Zelda went out to the powder room to repair her make-up. A mirror over the dressing table covered all one wall, reflecting gold mermaids swimming in a black sea of wallpaper. The toilet was concealed behind a partition. Zelda remembered something her grandfather had said once--at least thirty five years ago, it must have been, on one of his rare visits to Framington from his mid-western farm.

"Toilets in the house!" he had muttered. "Disgusting!" Zelda examined herself in the mirror and decided she looked like hell. She had started off all right. Even Ann, who seldom gave her a compliment, had said she looked nice. But this was that awful zero hour when dinner was over and the cocktails had worn off and you wondered how you could possibly get through another two or three hours. You looked and felt as if you'd been up all night, though it was only about 9.30, and you didn't think you could utter another civil word to anybody. If you had had anything on your mind before you came, this was the time when it seemed least likely ever to turn out well.

Zelda repaired her lipstick and got up. She couldn't stay in there all night, though she'd have liked to try it. What had ever

made her think she would come here this evening and face all these people and laugh and talk when her whole life was in the balance.

Dan Stratbridge met her at the entrance to the living-room. "I'm showing some of them my gardens by moonlight," he said. "Do you want to come?"

She had already made an enforced tour of the gardens by daylight. The last thing she wanted to do was see them again in the dark. But she said she'd love to. It would be interesting, she thought, to keep track of all the hours she spent doing things she didn't want to do because someone else would be hurt or uncomfortable or annoyed if she refused.

Dan had snared about half the guests. The others, including Tony, had got up canasta and bridge games and were set apart at tables in the library. Tony liked bridge and was an expert player, but Zeida was no good at any kind of cards. She could never remember what had been played, and it didn't seem important enough to her to make the effort. It was one of the things on which she and Tony did not see eye to eye.

"My idea of a game," she had told him once, "is something where everybody laughs and has fun. If I'm going to concentrate and worry and get all worked up, it isn't going to be for diversion."

"But what's the fun if it's so easy that it requires no skill? Where's the challenge?"

"I don't see why everything has to be a challenge."

"Then there's no argument, is there, Babe?" It's a matter of temperament," he had said. "You stick to Slap-Jack if you want to."

Slap-Jack! I used to play that with my brother, Billy, and it almost made me a nervous wreck. I'd wait trembling for the Jack to be turned up, and when it was I'd sit there paralyzed while Billy slammed his hand down on it so hard the table jumped. That was a terrible game. Like waiting for somebody to look over at you and yell 'Boo!'"

Tom had laughed until the tears came. He didn't often laugh

that you are not interested in him. You are only interested in the thing campaign—Jim—How did she know that the other half of his mind was?

"Look at this delphinium. Look at the color of it in the light," Dan was saying. "Did you ever see anything like that?"

They all murmured that they never had. Corey Watson came up behind Zelda and whispered, "This is Dan's substitute for sex. Every time he sees a woman he'd like to sleep with, he comes out here and plants a flower instead."

Corey was their doctor, a big, large featured, good-looking man, a year or two older than Zelda. Like many doctors, he had a bawdy tongue, and sometimes he carried it too far. He had lost patients because of it. One woman had said of him that he had no bedside manner; he crawled right in. The quip went the rounds and at least one nervous husband insisted that his wife find another doctor.

Zelda knew there was no harm in him. She understood him and liked him and thought he was a fine physician. He had lost his wife and only child in an automobile accident ten years before. She thought he had a right to be bawdy if he felt like it.

"Why flowers?" she asked him now. "What's the matter with Dorothy?"

He put his arm around her. "Frigid," he said.

"How do you know?"

He shrugged. "Any woman who talks that much has to be frigid. She can't have any energy left for anything else. Besides, she's a college graduate."

"What on earth has that to do with it?"

"Everything," he said. "Didn't you know that? The more education a woman has, the worse she is in bed."

Zelda laughed. "Corey, you're an idiot. Come along, now, and look at the pretty delphinium."

"All right. But what I just told you is a scientific fact. I can show you the statistics. College women—"

"No," said Corey. "I'm waiting for us to catch up."

She pulled herself from his arm and they walked along a path between rows of tree roses to join the others. She thought of her father back in Framington. He had died twenty years ago, at fifty-six, so that he must have been about Corey's age when she was a child. She could see him clearly, coming into her bedroom with the little limp he had from the Spanish-American war, his hair gray and his face lined and reassuringly kindly. It was impossible to imagine him with his arm around a woman, measuring the effect of education on sexual response. Certainly not then. He had been an aging man.

"There's never been a generation that stayed young as long as ours," she said to Corey. "Tony's always saying that, and it's true. Maybe that's what's wrong with us."

"What's wrong with us?" Corey said. "I think we're wonderful."

Dan was digging up a plant as they approached. He had taken off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves, and while he dug someone held a flashlight to augment the light from the moon.

"No trouble at all," he was saying. "They're too thick in here anyway. I'd only have dug it up tomorrow and thrown it away."

A small, dark woman whom Zelda did not recognize was standing near him, puffing nervously at a cigarette. "I don't feel right, though, about having you do it at this hour, in your good clothes. I'm not even sure it will take on my terrace. I only have a little earth, you know. And it might not last until I get back to town."

"It will be fine," Dan said. "I'll just wrap it in newspaper and put it in the back of your car, and when you get home you stick it right in, press it down firmly, soak it with water, and cover it with more earth. It'll be fine. Nothing kills these babies."

"You don't think it could wait until morning?" the woman asked.

"No, no. I'd put it right in as soon as you get home."

The woman dropped the cigarette and gave it into the

grass with her heel. "That'll be dandy," she said under her breath, at last to herself, the meaning.

Dan finished digging up the plant and went off with it and the guests, released, began drifting back to the house. Someone called to Corey that he was wanted on the telephone.

The woman from town walked along with Zelda. "I don't want that damn plant," she said. "I just said to be polite, but it would look beautiful on my terrace, and the first thing you know he was digging it up for me. I've got to put it in, too, because they're coming to a cocktail party I'm giving next Sunday, and that's the first thing Dan will look for." She looked at Zelda and laughed. "I hope you're not one of his spies."

"No, I'm on your side," Zelda said. "I suppose we were introduced, but names and faces always become a blur to me at a party like this. I'm Zelda Halliday."

"For goodness sake! Marcia's sister?"

"Yes. Are you a friend of Marcia's?"

The other woman grasped Zelda's arm. Zelda could feel the tips of her long nails. "I'm Lex's cousin, Paula Thayer. Marcia's mentioned me, hasn't she? My dear, we must sit down somewhere and talk. This is the most marvelous coincidence." She looked around the garden. "There's a bench. Come on. Nobody will miss us".

Zelda followed her. She could not place her for a moment, though she knew she had heard the name, but by the time they reached the bench she had remembered. Paula Thayer. She was the woman who had telephoned Marcia weeks ago and told her that she had been questioned by the F.B.I. about Nancy Decker.

"Marcia said she was going to call me," Paula Thayer said as they sat down. "What's happened to her? Is she still with you?"

Marcia was always saying she was going to call people and then never doing it. So was Zelda, but for a different reason. Zelda knew when she said it that she would not call; she only meant to be pleasant. But Marcia loved people. She wanted to make friends with everyone she met. The trouble was that she was likely to forget them an hour later.

"She's still here," Zelda said, "but she really hasn't had a minute to herself." She added vaguely, "You know Marcia."

"I do indeed." The other woman laughed. She laughed frequently rather coarsely, Zelda thought, although her voice, when she spoke, was quite soft. "From what I've heard, it's my dear cousin who's keeping her busy."

Zelda did not answer. She had thought, during the plant episode, that she might like this woman, but she had changed her mind. In the dark garden she could see dimly a short, sharp nose and a prominent chin, a witch's profile. The eyes, she was sure, were gleaming. Why don't I go away? she thought. Haven't I heard enough questions about Lex?

"Is it true they're going to be married again?" Paula Thayer asked.

"I'm sure I don't know. You'll have to ask Marcia."

"You think I'm snooping." She laughed. "Well, I am, of course. Why shouldn't I? Lex is my cousin. Everybody keeps asking me and I don't know a thing more than anyone else. It's maddening. But if you won't tell me anything, you won't."

She was so open about it that Zelda was a little disarmed. "There's really nothing to tell. Lex is around a good deal, but he's my husband's closest friend, you know, and an old friend of mine. He'd visit us even if Marcia weren't there."

Paula lit another cigarette and held the match for Zelda. "I suppose the F.B.I. has been questioning you too?"

"Yes. That's routine," Zelda said, reciting her lesson. "They're very careful about anyone trying to get into the State Department."

"Sometimes you wouldn't think it, would you?" Paula laughed. "I don't understand all the interest in Nancy Dellett though, do you?" Nancy Dellett. Even here, at a dinner party, there was no getting away from her. "I mean, that was six years ago, Lex and Nancy," Paula said, "and I don't get the connection anyway. Do they think she's a communist?"

Six years ago. Twenty-four years ago. Tony. d Nancy. Lex

and Nancy. Did the police suspect anything? "Not a thing," she always answered, "not anything. I'm sure. I'm sure."

"I have decided," she told Paula. "Her lips felt cold."
"She isn't, of course. She wouldn't be that interested in anything but herself. She's an awful bitch. Do you know her?"

"Slightly."
"Well, take it from me, I've seen plenty of them—maybe I'm sort of a one myself—but she's the bitch of the world. Do you know Walter, her ex?" Zelda shook her head. "He's a good snook. Nobody to set the world on fire, but a real good snook. You know what she did to him?" She told him their younger boy, whom he idolized, might not be his boy at all. That's what she told him after she got her divorce and a fat settlement, just for spite, because there wasn't any other point, whether it was true or not."

"That's fantastic," Zelda said. "It sounds like something out of 'Rebecca.' How would you know, anyway? Were you there when she's supposed to have told him?"

"No, not personally," Paula laughed. "But these things get around. Maybe a maid overheard it. Maybe Walter let something slip—he's a little on the dumb side. I don't know how it got out, but it did. Everybody knows about it. I'm surprised you haven't heard it." She turned her face toward Zelda, away from the light. All Zelda could see was a black blur. "The F.B.I. has."

"What do you mean?"

"The investigator was very subtle, of course, but I knew what he was getting at. He thinks if the boy really isn't Walter's, maybe he's Lex's. The kid's about five. It would fit," she shrugged. "I don't see why the State Department should care if Lex has an illegitimate son, do you?"

Zelda gripped the edge of the bench. The stone felt rough and cold under her fingers. She would not have thought she could speak, but the words came glibly, like a recording of a prepared speech. "A man with something like that in his life would be open to blackmail. That's what they're afraid of." Her family was explaining this. So nicely and reasonably. "I can have

to invent a possibility, no matter how remote. Certainly this was not enough. As far as she can see, it's all based on running. She should have stopped there, but she had to go on. "Even if it should be true, why Lex? Does the boy look like Lex?"

"I don't know," Paula said. "You can always read a resemblance if you want to. He isn't blond."

"No," Zelda said foolishly, "he's dark then."

"I don't see how they expect to find out anyhow," Paula said. "Nancy may not even know herself."

Zelda stood up. "It's probably not necessary to have definite proof. Suspicion may be enough."

She walked rapidly back toward the house, the other woman's footsteps sounding like an echo of her own on the walk. Paula was still talking, but Zelda did not listen any more. She wished she had not listened at all. Now she could no longer hide from herself the meaning of Mr. Nye's quiet, persistent questions. This was it. This was what he thought she knew and kept coming back for, hoping to find out, hoping she would tell him, perhaps without realizing she was telling him.

"Mr. Whitton resumed his friendship with Mrs. Dellett a few years ago, didn't he? . . . While she was working in your husband's office? . . . Then, as I understand it, she had to leave because she was ill. Do you know what her illness was? No? . . . She went back to her husband for a time, I'm told, and then finally divorced him. But in the meanwhile she gave birth to a second son. Do you know anything about that? No? . . ."

She would have to go home now. She would have to say she was ill. It would be no lie. She felt ill. The house seemed glaringly bright, hurting her eyes, nauseatingly hot after the cool dark outside. Zelda escaped Paula Thayer and went in to find

"Let's make this the last rubber," he suggested to the others.

Nobody protested, not even Dorothy, who should have. Her makeup did not seem as smooth as it had earlier, and her eyes behind her round spectacles had lost their bright look. Probably

she would slump into a chair in the smoke-filled room, sour, tired, distressed, wondering what she had done and how to undo it. "I thought they'd never go." Yet she would keep right on coming for the dinner parties a year.

When at last it was time to leave, there was a spurt of conversation. Everybody began talking at once, and the conversation seemed almost as sparkling as it had during cocktails. They all assured Dan and Dorothy that it had been a wonderful party, and at that moment of release it seemed true.

"God!" Tony said in the car. "I hope I never get stuck in a bridge game with that Evan woman again. She doesn't know a card from her—"

"Never mind," Zeid'a said. "Why do you always get obscene after midnight?"

He laughed. He was in very good spirits. He had won thirty-four dollars and he was a little tight. "I didn't know I did. Obscenity after Midnight. It sounds like the title of a play."

It was funny, she thought. He was so little like the boy she had married, the slow-talking, gentle, sweet boy, and yet she had never stopped loving him. She had changed too, of course. It was funny that the two different people they had become should still get along as well as they did. She didn't want to change, spoiling it now any more than she had six years ago. Maybe that was a sort of cowardice but there it was.

"Say, by the way," he said. "what the devil did you say to Sam Evan, anyhow? He seems to think you're a communist sympathizer."

"I quoted from John Stuart Mill. I don't believe he had ever heard of him. He probably thinks he collaborated with Marx and Engels."

"You must have said something else. Sam told me you advocate teaching communism in the schools."

He sounded perfectly sober now, and less agreeable. Sam, she thought. His old pal, Sam. As far as she knew, they had met only once or twice before, at parties like the one tonight.

"I'm not surprised he told you that. It's typical. I know

I said nothing of the kind. I quoted Mill," she repeated. "I suggested that burning the opposition is sometimes more dangerous than letting them rave and hang themselves with their own rope. I never disapproved burning the books."

"Burning the books? What books?"

They had turned on to the Boston Post Road, where gleaming modern trucks as big as houses, with massive eyes that lit the road like daylight, rumbled ceaselessly by on a Saturday night. They had to talk loud to be heard above the roar.

"Any books," she said. "You don't believe in burning them, do you? My mother wouldn't allow 'The Sheik' in the house, so I got hold of it somewhere else. I thought it must be fascinating if she banned it. Any book. It's the same thing."

She had not found "The Sheik" fascinating at all, only silly. It had not even been especially wicked, except for one part. After a while the book had fallen open of its own accord to that page. She could remember it still. It was where the heroine in the Sheik's tent had seen him looking at her as though he could see through her riding clothes to her naked body. That, in her thirteen-year-old opinion, had been scandalous enough for anyone.

"What's Evan got to do with 'The Sheik'?" Tony inquired, in that way he had sometimes of making what she said sound absurd. "All I know is he was planning an advertising campaign and I had a chance at it, but I don't think he'll give it to me now. You've got to be careful with this loose talk. I don't want to lose clients. What do you think we go to these parties for?"

That was incredible. A moment ago she had been thinking how well they got along, in spite of everything, and now they were as far apart as if they had just met. If she didn't know this about him, how could she know anything?

"Tony," she said. "Tony, do you know who Sam Evan is?"

"I know all right. He's the Evan Realty Company. He's about to put up one of the largest garden apartment developments in the city, and he wants to advertise it."

"He's also the head of the Committee of Twelve."

"He was?" Tony turned off the Post Road to a street that wound away from the noise of the bridge, between rows of quiet little houses. When he spoke again, his tone had changed. "You mean that bunch that raised all the ruckus in the school, fussing for the little communists that weren't there?" He chuckled. "And you quoted Mill to him. No wonder!"

She was still not sure whose side he was on. "No wonder what?"

"No wonder he thought you were a commie. I heard the only thing they had against one teacher was that she told her class the Mexican War was a war of conquest, with us putting it over on the Mexicans. That's not half as liberal as Mill." He slowed the car almost to a crawl. "Tell me exactly what you said."

She quoted the conversation as accurately as she could remember it, and when she had finished he gave her a good, solid buss on the cheek, said, "That's my Babe!" and sent the car speeding around the curves of the road on screeching tires.

"What about the campaign?"

"He can take his campaign and stick it -"

"Never mind," Zelda interrupted.

"The Sheik," he said. "I never read the book but I saw the movie. Vilma Banky and Rudolph Valentino."

"Not Vilma Banky. Agnes Ayres."

"No, it was Vilma Banky."

"It was Agnes Ayres. It couldn't have been Vilma Banky. She had a foreign accent, and the girl in the Sheik was an English girl, or something."

He sighed. "How many times in one night do you want to prove me wrong? What's going to happen to my male superiority?"

It occurred to her that at this moment she was quite happy. None of her terrible questions had been answered, nothing had been solved or settled except that Tony did after all agree with her about Sam Evan, and yet she was happy. It was just she was pleasantly drowsy, the road was dark and quiet, and they

were going home together, talking nonsense as though they were not married people with grown children, and she was happy. It was false, but it was true.

Zelda was alone in the breakfast room the next morning, drinking her second cup of coffee, when Labby Gorman came to the back door. Tony was at the club for his Sunday golf game. Jim had telephoned the night before, as he often did now, to say that he was going to a late party and would stay over at a hotel. The rest of the household was asleep. Zelda had scarcely slept at all.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Labby said. "I was looking for Jim. I thought he might be—sometimes on Sundays he's out here cleaning his car."

The preposterous sense that Zelda had noted that day in the market, the last time she had seen the gulf, was gone. She stood peering in through the screen door as though she thought Zelda might be concealing Jim under the table, and although her hands were hanging at her sides, she gave Zelda the impression that she was wringing them.

If she had looked less distraught, Ze'da would not have asked her in. She was in no mood, after the long night of questions without answers, to entertain Jim's discarded girl. But she could not leave her standing there like that.

"Jim isn't home," Zelda said. "Won't you come in?"

"Oh, no, I—" She started to turn away and then changed her mind. "Well, yes. Yes, I will."

She opened the door and walked in resolutely, but when she was there she seemed not to know what to do next. Her mouth was a little open, showing those tiny, regular teeth, and Zelda thought she looked almost vacant. She was pretty, though, and her little-boy shorts showed off improbably long, lovely legs.

Pretty, long-legged, mannered, vapid. Miss Junior College (née finishing school) Zelda thought. All exotic ancestral juices removed, all individuality of speech, mannerism, outlook boiled off, until only synthetic distillation remained.

"Sit down," Zelda said. "Have a cup of coffee."

Libby sat at the table and turned the coffee slowly. "Thank you, I really mean that," she said. "I don't know how to make it sound pleasant," but not quite. "I just wanted to say that for a minute."

"Jim didn't come home last night," Zelda told her. "We know as well know. I haven't any idea when he'll be here."

Libby pushed the cup and saucer away and then pulled a chair. "Where did he go?" she asked with polite interest.

"To a party in New York," Zelda said, and then asked, also with polite interest. "Was it something important?"

"No. No, nothing important." She had finished her coffee. There was no reason for her to stay any longer. But she did not go. She sat looking down at the empty cup, and her lower lip began to protrude a little in a kind of trembling pout. "How did you influence him against me?" she asked, in the same soft, correct voice. "What did you say to him?"

It was so unexpected that for a moment Zelda could not speak. "My dear child," she said then. I would like the slippers, did party in a drawing room comedy, she thought. "My dear child, what are you talking about?"

"Please." The word, particularly since it was a while before she followed it up, did not seem to have any connection with anything. "I don't suppose you can help it," she went on finally. "I suppose you'd be jealous of any girl he liked. I don't mean just you," she put in hastily, as Zelda was about to speak. "Mothers in general. Mothers with sons. They always think the girl is good enough."

"My dear child—" The phrase kept recurring, like a line in rehearsal. "You've been reading things." What did they read? Not Sophocles or Freud, certainly. Possibly Philip Wylie. But they didn't have to read, of course. Every purveyor of soap opera had the silver cord in his bag.

Libby looked at her for the first time with soft, hurt eyes. "I don't know how to talk to you," she said. "You're too clever for me."

"Dear heaven! Zelda thought. Now she felt guilty. She had

was the ~~same~~ woman in the drawing room comedy, and this was the ~~same~~ woman whose wife came to plead with her to give up her husband. ~~Libby~~ where was the comedy?

"I don't mean to be clever, Libby," she said. "I just don't understand all this. Believe me, if there's anything wrong between you and Jim I had nothing to do with it. I've never tried in any way to break up your friendship." How self-righteous I sound, she thought, when I had every intention of trying to break it up. She smiled. "Even if I had wanted to, you overestimate my influence on Jim."

Libby seemed to hear only the last sentence. She shook her head. "Maybe you think you're not influencing him. Maybe he argues or won't even listen much. I do that with my parents. We all do. But a lot of it sinks in just the same. We don't like to admit it, that's all."

Zelda looked at her more closely. Her head was bent over the cup again, and the back of her neck was white at the hairline where the sun had not got at it. There was something pathetic about that bit of white neck. Zelda could not have told why. But as she looked at it she thought, She's only a child, only two years older than Ann.

Zelda spoke gently. "Won't you take my word for it that I had no part in this? I think Jim met another girl. I don't even know who she is." It cost her something to admit this. She went farther, farther than she had intended. "Perhaps it's only an infatuation, and he'll come back to you."

"He's engaged to her," Libby said.

Zelda leaned forward against the table. The edge cut into her nose. "Oh no," she said. "You must be mistaken." She said again, foolishly, "I don't even know who she is."

"He came over Friday night to tell me," Libby said. "When I saw him coming, I thought-- But it was just to tell me. He said it was a secret. Only he thought he owed it to me to tell me. He took a deep breath and let it out in a quivering sigh, like he had been running down after a crying spell." "I told him he

didn't owe me anything. I told him to go to hell. That's why I came this morning, to take it back and make him like it."

"Do you know who the girl is?"

She shook her head. After a minute she said, "I never thought I'd tell you. I didn't intend to, but I couldn't help it." She stopped and raised her eyes from the cup. They no longer had the wounded doe look. "That's a lie. I did intend to. I'm glad I told you. Maybe now you can break it up."

"If she's a nice girl and Jim loves her, why should I want to break it up?"

"There must be something funny about it," Libby said. "He didn't keep me a secret, did he?" She began to cry, but she stopped quickly and blew her nose violently. "I'm sorry. I'm acting like a dope."

"It's all right. Cry if you want to."

"Thank you," she said politely. She got up as if to go. "I want you to know I did what you asked me to that day. I tried to tell Jim he wouldn't be happy in his father's office. That's what started it."

Zelda looked up at the girl. Something hurt her. She was up aware that the edge of the table was still digging into her ribs. "You told him that? Because I asked you to?"

"Not exactly. It's what I thought too. But he got mad when I told him. He left without kissing me good night, he was so mad, and I've hardly seen anything of him since. The few days we have had, it wasn't the same at all. I couldn't even talk to him."

She stood well, like a girl who had had classes in posture and walked up and down stairs with a book on her head. Perhaps they had taught her to keep her mouth open too, like a breathless child, showing the perfect little teeth. It wasn't her fault. It was the aseptic, pseudo-British model they turned out in the schools for parents who considered the standard American variety crude. In spite of it, she was a nice child.

"Thank you for listening to me," she said. "I didn't mean—I never expected—" She stopped and started again. "I'm sorry."

for bargaining like this. It was nice of you to let me. You're not the way I thought you were."

Zelda smiled. "I misjudged you too." She walked out to the door with the girl. "If there's anything I can do, I will."

When Libby had gone, she made herself another cup of coffee and stood leaning against the kitchen counter, gulping it. Now there was this. Everything at once.

If there's anything I can do-- But she had a desolate feeling that there would be nothing. It was the same helplessness she had felt when Jim was eleven or twelve, so absorbed in a model plane he was building that he would not come to dinner. She had gone into his room to take the plane away from him, and he had held her hands, smiling in his ingratiating way, but all at once too strong for her, overnight beyond her physical power.

She would have to stand by and watch this girl who had her claws in him-- But this was the same phrase that had come into her mind about Libby a few weeks ago. She did not even know who the girl was. It hadn't worried her seriously when she thought it was just someone with whom he was having an affair, who would help him get Libby out of his system but now she was an enemy.

"Good Lord!" she said out loud, and then she heard Marcia's step outside the kitchen, that incredibly light, quick step, and her sister came in, dressed in a violet blue nylon housecoat that Zelda had never seen before. "Good morning," Zelda said. "You look positively orchidaceous."

Marcia looked down at herself. "This old thing? I've had it since Thursday. What were you 'Good Lord-ing' about?"

Zelda poured her a cup of coffee. This was all she would have now, and at dinner, in two hours, she would plead that she was starved because she hadn't had a thing but a cup of black coffee "all day long."

"I've just discovered," Zelda said, "that I don't like any girls who want to marry Jim. The way it says in the books and on 'John's Other Wife's Mother in Law.' Libby was here suggesting as much, and I said, 'My dear child, hahaha!'. But there it is."

"Who's Libby?"

"One of the girls who wants to marry Jim. Don't like her."

"Come on, the one who looks like Catnip's girl." Marcia stirred her coffee. She liked it served steaming hot, but never touched it until it was almost cold. "How very astute of you."

"Meaning you've seen it all along?"

Marcia ignored this. "Astuter of you, I guess," she said. "But then you always were one to analyze the hell out of everything, including yourself. How can you have any fun?" She didn't wait for Zelda to answer. "So you're jealous of Jim's girls. What are you going to do? Go to a psychiatrist? Jim will marry one of them anyway, in spite of you, and you'll have to pretend to like her whether you do or not, and maybe in time you'll get used to her." She tasted a little of the coffee gingerly, grimaced, and put the cup down again. "You might as well relax," she said.

Zelda laughed. "Oh, Marce, you're wonderful; you're good for me. I'm glad you're here."

"Me too." She tried the coffee again and her eyes laughed over the edge of the cup. With that much of her face showing, she might have been eighteen. "I haven't had fun like this summer since Moses went to Chicago." She giggled. "Remember who used to say that?"

"Sure. Grandpa. What does it mean, anyhow?"

"I don't know. I guess grandpa thought it was devilish. You know that big, wicked city, Chicago."

There was a picture of grandpa hanging over the mantel in Framington. It had hung there even while he was alive, his sharp little black eyes and eagle nose and domed forehead dominating the room. Their mother had moved it to the dining room for a while after he died to make room for a landscape, but she had not kept it there. She said it made her nervous to have him watching her while she ate, as if he disapproved of her manners. He had gone back over the mantel and stayed there alone on the wall as he had been for twenty-four years, even after the death of his wife.

Whenever he came to Framlington to visit, the whole household knew that it meant that he was. He went to the parlor before he had a notion the upstairs rooms were too warm and the whole family breakfasted with him at six o'clock and had dinner at noon instead of in the evening. While he was there, the children did as he said, even if it was contrary to their habits. So did his daughter.

"He was a terror," Marcia said.

"Yes, but we were all crazy about him. We always wanted him to come."

"We were glad when he left, too. I think mostly we liked to tell stories about him, especially when he got older and was called a devil. There's nothing like a good, salty old family character."

"I don't know," Zelda said. "He was a patriarch. There are no patriarchs any more. Just a lot of people who have lived longer than anybody counted on. There was something awesome about grandpa because he was seventy-eight and still had some spirit, but today he'd be lost in the crowd."

Marcia stirred her coffee. "It's a good time to be alive. Any other time I'd have been the poor old aunt making antimacassars in your back bedroom." She giggled. "Instead of making love in a convertible."

Zelda looked at her and thought of Libby, who a few moments ago had sat where Marcia was sitting now. She could imagine Libby, at forty-five, making antimacassars. She could imagine Libby as an ancestor of Marcia's.

"I'm glad you're satisfied with life," Zelda said. "Not many people are."

"Well, I should have had kids. Lex didn't want to be the doctor, but I'd have been good with them. Kids need a lot of love. I've always had a sort of talent for love." She grinned. "I can't complain, though. It was my own choice." She sipped the warm coffee. "Aren't you satisfied, Zel?"

"Sometimes. Last night, coming home from the Partridge's, I was thoughtful, and none of the dissatisfactions or the worries

mattered. This morning the feeling's all dissolved. I can't explain it."

"Once when mama was sick," Marcia said, "and I thought she was going to die—after Roddie was born, I think it was—I was sitting out on the porch while the doctor was in her room, and some boy passed by and grinned at me. I remember thinking I was glad I had my pink dress on, because I knew it was becoming, and I smiled back at him and the weight in my chest went away. Mama was worse that night, and for a long time I felt guilty because I'd been happy for a little while." She lit a cigarette and inhaled the smoke in that way of hers, as though she could not get enough of it. "Then I began to think that was a crazy idea, a wrong idea, to feel guilty for being happy. I'd had those few minutes and I was better off for them. Who was going to begrudge them to me? Not mama. Not anybody. Unless I begrudged them to myself."

"You're talking about a moment," Zelda said. "The way you felt when the boy smiled at you—the way I felt last night. Those are happy moments, but they aren't enough. Happiness is something deeper, more basic."

"Is it? The only happiness I know is made up of happy moments. That's how we live, isn't it? In moments?" She put her cup down and the spoon jumped in the saucer. "This is a hell of a conversation for the crack of dawn. How did we get into it, anyway? Let's talk about something else. Tell me about the party."

Zelda took the cups to the sink and washed them. The soap dish was clogged with gelatinous soap, and she muttered to herself about Rena's carelessness, rehearsing what she would say to her tomorrow, lines she would never use.

"Paula Thayer was there," she told Marcia. "She said you promised to call her and never did."

"I know. I meant to. I will, this week. She's an amazing girl. She does a lot of talking."

"Yes. She tells everything she knows. What else has she got

to offer? She has no husband any more, no looks, and only a little money as money goes today.

Zelda let the water run and talked above it. Once when she had been a small child, forced against her will to apologize to another child for something, she had held her ears so that she could not hear herself say she was sorry.

"Maybe she tells things she doesn't know, too. She was putting to give me the low-down on Nancy Dellett. It all sounded pretty preposterous. Something about Nancy's taunting her husband, after their divorce, with the idea that her son might not be his."

It seemed a long while before Marcia actually spoke. "I suppose it might be true," she said indifferently. "Nancy hated Walter."

Zelda did not know whether she meant it might be true that Nancy had taunted him, or it might be true that the boy was not his son. Before she could ask, Marcia said:

"She probably never forgave him for losing his money in '29. That was what she gave up Tony for, and she ended up without the man or the money."

Did she? Zelda thought. Did she? "It's strange," she said, "how men can love women like that."

"Men don't love women for their characters. Nancy's a fascinating gal. Or was when I knew her. Beautiful and fascinating. Who needs character?"

The words of a palely lewd song from her girlhood ran irresistibly through Zelda's mind. It began:

I wish I was a fascinating bitch;
I'd never be poor, I'd always be rich . . .

"I only saw her twice, you know," she said. "Once at the office when she was working for Tony, and once up here at a party. I don't remember her very well."

But of course she remembered her very well. She remembered everything about her. The tall, magnificent body, the pale, impersonal face and the heavy hair twisted into an intricate

knot at the back of her head, so old-fashioned that it ultra-modern. She remembered the trick of her father's looking steadily the cold, grave, almost sad, face, in which the same sort of rhythm with which her wit punctuated her long, listening silences. As Marcia said, who needed character?

"That F.B.I. guy was always poking away about her, so carefully, you know, so that I never knew exactly what he was in mind. Do you suppose he's finished with us? It's a while now he's been around."

"I don't know," Zelda said. "I think he'll be back."

The front screen door banged and Tony came into the kitchen. He was brown and smiling and he greeted them with apparent amiability, but Zelda knew, with that connubial sixth sense that he was not in a pleasant mood, probably because he had been off his game. It was something she could understand no more than she could the silent intensity of a bridge game. Surely pleasure should not be pursued so guimly that the outcome could be of shattering consequence.

"How about some bacon and eggs?" she asked him soothingly. "I can have them ready by the time you've showered and changed."

"I don't think so. Just coffee," he said. "Where's Lex?"

"Where do you think, at this ungodly hour?" Marcia asked. "Asleep, of course."

Tony looked at the clock. "Ten after twelve," he said, and walked out. A minute later he was back. "I'm home yet?"

"Not yet."

He started to speak, looked at Marcia and changed his mind. As he went out, they could hear him muttering something about a decadent bunch."

"What's eating him?" Marcia asked.

"I suspect he shot over 85."

She wanted to tell him about Jim, but she would have to wait until his mood changed. Such childishness, she thought, in a man in a 'pet because he had not done well at bridge.

She wanted to tell him about his top. Which one? her brain
chattered. "Which one?" she asked him.

"Which one?" he asked me, Lex said, appearing in the doorway.
"The one hanging on my door and told me to get up if I wanted
breakfast. 'We're not running a hotel,' quoth he. 'Last call for
bacon and eggs. If you want some, go down and tell Zel.' " Lex
put his arm around Zelda. "I do want some. I do indeed. But
I didn't think you were running a hotel, not for a minute. I
have cooked my own bacon and eggs."

"Why don't you?" Marcia suggested. "It's not too late."

He looked down at Zelda. Though he could have been up only
a few minutes, he was freshly shaved and combed and hand
rubbed the collar of his yellow and blue pajamas folded neatly
back over his blue striped robe, the scent of one of those new
ready colognes about him, piney or tweedy or woodsy.

"Do you want me to, Zelda?" he asked, as tenderly as though
he were asking if she wanted him to kiss her. "I'd be glad to."

She moved away from him to get the eggs out of the refrigerator
and "I'm cooking something for Tony anyway," she said.

"What did you expect her to say?" Marcia sat down on the
red metal ladder stool, and the little seat overflowed with violet
noise. "You know why you know it's not a hotel? Because
there aren't any bills."

"Now, Marcia," he said. Now, mom, Zelda thought. Now
she said "What are you suggesting? That I'm a sponger?"

"Isn't you?"

He grinned. "Sure. But Zelda doesn't mind, do you, Zel?
When I get my brave new job, I'll make up for everything.
Presents, Champagne. A party that will be heard round the
world."

He broke the eggs into a bowl. "Do you think the job
comes through all right?"

"I hope so." He hoisted himself up to the counter as lightly
as a cat and sat there swinging his legs, but where his pajamas
fell over his neck a little Zelda could see the flabbiness

the sun-tanned skin. "My life's an open book," he said, "if I may coin a phrase."

"Oh, Zel!" Tony called from upstairs. "I think I shall have bacon and eggs at that!"

"I know," Zelda called back. "I'm cooking them. Take one irritable husband," she said to Marcia and Lex, "put under cool running water for five minutes, dry thoroughly and serve."

"I should have married you, Zel," Lex said. "You know how to handle a man."

Yes, indeed, Zelda thought. Peace at all costs. Blind, deaf, dumb, but peace. "You had your chance," she said, and had no idea why she said this now, after so many years. "Did you know that, Marce? Did you know I was crazy about him once?"

"Sure." Marcia got up and began setting the table in the breakfast room. "You used to neck with him at the studio when he and I had a late date."

Zelda looked at Lex, but he was gazing up at the ceiling, swinging his legs and whistling softly. He was enjoying this, she thought. She wished she hadn't started it.

"He didn't tell me," Marcia said. "Even Lex has his code. But you were never cut out for intrigue, Zel." She laughed. "You used to act like the dame caught in the net in the silent movies, making a big thing of smoothing her hair and straightening her dress, so the audience would be sure to get the idea."

Zelda put the bacon on paper to drain. "Well, well. And all these years you never said."

"I didn't think it was important. I'm going up to dress," she said. "This character is taking me to a polo match this afternoon, and if I don't start now I won't be ready." She winked at Zelda. "See you make him wash the dishes."

Zelda called to Tony, and put the bacon and eggs on the table. "She deserves better than you, Lex," she said. "I hope she knows it this time."

"I hope she doesn't." He slid off the counter. "Somebody has to get the short end," he said amiably.

"She's had it."

"So have I, Lex. You never met my second wife. There's a horror story. If you want to hear it some time."

"I have. She kept jumping into strange beds. Didn't you?"

"There was more to it than that." He sounded annoyed, but a moment later he chuckled. "What if you had married me, Zed? It could have happened. A little this way or the other and it would have. We'd still be married, I'll bet. You'd have hung on."

"You mean, in spite of anything?"

"I think so," he said. "I think you like to keep what you've got. If it's yours, it's good. Am I right?"

"I don't know, Lex."

Tony came down in a new Persian print shirt and slacks that buttoned across the waist without a belt. "That smells good," he said. He kissed Zed, patted Lex's shoulder and sat down. "What a foul game I had this morning! I think they moved the greens every time they saw me coming."

"You ought to sleep late Sundays," Lex said. "It would do you more good."

Tony shook his head. "Life's too short."

"It might be shorter on the golf course. Nobody ever dropped dead in bed."

"You're a lazy son of a gun. You always were."

"Not lazy, just relaxed. No ulcers."

When Lex had finished eating, he went up to dress for the polo match and Tony looked at the paper. "These damn truck tails," he said. "It's like two strange dogs. Have you ever watched that? They circle around each other, stiff legged and wary, sniffing, and it's a toss-up whether it will all come to nothing or whether they'll be at each other's throats. Put a bone between them and you can't make sure. If you can stand it, I guess it's better to wait."

"I can hardly remember when we had peace," she said. "It seems as though all the wars we've known have blended into one, and the streets have always been full of uniforms, all our lives."

"It only seems that way to us. For the kids it's really so." He

slammed the paper down on the table. "Where the devil is Jim?"
The little girl was silent. She had to be honest with him. The
office with him. Tony, Libby was here. She says Jim is not
engaged to some girl. They're keeping it from him. He
ought to tell Libby."

Tony's face turned white. "Did she say who it was?"

"No. He didn't tell her."

"I think I know." He got up and began walking up and down
between the kitchen and the breakfast room. She wished he
would sit down again, near her. He was so separate from her
with his anger over something she knew nothing about. She
wished he would sit down and put his arm around her.

"I think he's doing this for spite," he said. "To show me he
cause I warned him against her."

"Who, Tony? Who is it?"

She could not reach him. All he could hear were his own
thoughts. "What have I done to him? What does he think I've
done? We've always been pretty close. I've--" He stopped and
looked down at Zelda. "He barged into the office once a couple
of years ago, when he was supposed to be at school, and said he
needed money to get back. I didn't even ask him any questions
just gave it to him. What does he want?"

Of all the things he had done for Jim, this was what he re-
membered; this was the peak of paternal understanding. No
questions asked.

Zelda could think of nothing to say to him except, "Maybe it
isn't the girl you think it is."

"If it were anyone else, he'd have told us. He'd have brought
her around." He continued his pacing. "I don't know what she
wants of him, but she wants something. That little damsel has
made an uncalculated move in her life."

"Tony, for heaven's sake tell me who she is."

He looked at her with surprise. "Hallie Breed. You know her
at the office. She writes copy, among other things. I don't
know if she's ever been to the office. It made her feel awkward
though she were playing a part for which she had been trained."

The receptionist, the first lady of the Halliday Advertising Agency, was a woman who was going to make a point of treating the receptionist as a peer and the company as a family. After all, she had been a receptionist for

"I don't remember her," she said. "What is she like?"

"She made an impatient gesture, as though it didn't matter who she was like. 'Three or four years older than Jim—a thousand years older. Smart, smart as hell, full of drive, tough—'"

"I don't know. Yes, Yes, I suppose so, if you're young and the type is new to you. Babe" For the first time he seemed to look at her as something other than a sounding board. "Babe, I don't know how to stop it. If I say anything to him, I'll only turn him toward her all the more."

"Suppose I talk to him?"

"You can try." He shook his head, as though already negating the efforts. "I wish I understood it. I've never played the better part. Christ, I know what a kid feels like. I remember the way I used to hell around. There isn't anything he couldn't have said to me, that we couldn't have talked over. I don't know what happened."

"She thought she was going to cry. 'It isn't your fault, Tom. I can't believe you'd understand, that's all, or that you ever feel what he feels.'"

"There is something more. It's as though I'd done something wrong, as though he hated me. When I try to find out, he shuts me out from me."

"A lot of comfort, she thought. A wife must speak words of comfort. "It's nothing, I'm sure," she said. "Some phase he's going through. If you ignore it, I'm sure it will blow over."

"Maybe." His voice sounded a little better. He came to the back of a chair and stood rocking it. "Meanwhile, we've got to do something about this girl. If we can't get talking to him, and if that doesn't work—I don't know what to do about something."

"It will be all right," she said.

She took the first section of the paper and went into the kitchen with it, and she finished washing the dishes. She hung the dishes in the rack for Ann to dry when she came down. She had been up early to play tennis with Bill and then had gone back to bed. Whenever she had nothing else to do, she thought of how had been less robust. Zelda would have thought she was old.

Marcia and Lex came down to say goodbye before driving off to the polo match. Marcia was in pink now, a color no other woman should have worn, yet for her it was right, reflecting on her face, giving her a youthful glow. Her eyes sparkled like a girl's in anticipation of an afternoon's fun. Lex had a white scarf around his neck, under his cashmere sport jacket. He looked like a Hollywood character, but the flabbiness of his face was concealed.

"Aren't we a handsome couple?" he asked. "Me and my girl!" Zelda watched them zoom out of the driveway in the convertible. She felt like a settled old woman, watching the youngsters go off gaily for a good time. Only she wasn't settled. Her son was going to marry some awful girl unless they stopped him, and now were they going to stop him? And Nancy Dellet's son— She emptied an ash tray into the garbage pail, let the pail bang, and went out to the terrace. She took the first section of the paper with her so that if anyone came she could look as though she were reading it, but she did not read.

She had been so sure it was over, in fact and in her mind, finished and forgotten, finally. For such a long time she had not known. Every time he called to say he would be home, she thought, he may be with her; it may not be over, at least not now. She watched him so, and everything he did or said had meaning to her that it really was over—or that it was not. She had watched him with other women, and even hoped there might be someone else, because that would have been better, nothing

would have been better than the one entering in his life, or going out of it, as it were.

She would have confronted them, she would have at least had it out with him afterwards. That was the point of the party--she had seen Ann coming down from home from visiting some other child. Zelda had called for her to come in and meet the guests, but Ann had not come. She had gone looking for her, not wanting her to sneak in the back way as she always tried to do, feeling that it was time for her to learn a little social grace. She had not found her. She had found them, so senseless in their embrace that they had thought themselves invisible--or not cared--so deaf that they had not heard her panicky retreat. As though it had been she who was caught out!

This was no casual, suburban boredom, alcoholic party kind. Not with Nancy Delett who had once thrown Tony over for another man and had been working in his office ever since she had left her husband. Not with Nancy Delett. A dozen times he had fallen into the pattern then. The many nights he had suddenly had to stay in town. The strange, abstracted manner that she had attributed to the pressure of work. The phone call she had walked in on, when he had hung up suddenly and muttered something about a wrong number.

Zelda had not known what to do. She had tried to think she was mistaken, that it was nothing, but she could not black it out. Now that she knew, she saw it in everything Tony did and said. No one else would have told him. She thought she was going to tell him she thought she was going to have to divorce him. That was what she did.

But she said nothing. If he asked her-- He would not ask her. It would end, it would be over, she had only to wait. She told him she was doing it for the children, but it was more than that. She did not want to change anything, even by forgiving him. The Forgiving Wife. She did not want to be the forgiving wife. She wanted to be Babe, Tony's Babe, as though she had never been caught out.

She knew that Lex was a good man, but she had never

known him as he was now. He was a man who had been, as he had always been. This was what she had waited for, yet she felt bitter. He was a man who had been, as if nothing had happened, but for a long time she asked herself why and how, but then she stopped thinking because it was no use.

Where had Lex come in? she wondered now. When she was between Nancy and Tony, the same as all those years ago, between Nancy and Tony. Nancy and Lex, like one of those girls of the twenties revived in the forties.

Which one, which one, which one?

Excuse me—

The voice was soft, but Zelda almost jumped out of her seat. The Book Section fell to the flagstones, and the man who had been sprang to pick it up for her.

"Mrs. Halliday?" he said. "I am very sorry if I have disturbed you. I rang the doorbell, but there was nobody." He did not bow, but he gave the impression of bowing. "I am German, Mr. Weber, to see Ann."

He was thin-faced but stocky, deeply tanned, attractive. She thought. Yes, of course, Austrian. The Austrian camp.

"How do you do, Mr. Weber?"

"I hope I have not disturbed you. I did not know, which is no answer to my ring—"

"You haven't disturbed me." Nothing disturbs me, she thought. No matter what happens, the phone rings and the door is opened and people come and I say, It will be all right and you do? and nothing disturbs me. "I was just reading." "Is Ann expecting you?"

"I said I might come, if I could borrow my sister's car." He smiled a nice smile, a little tentative. "I do not have a car."

"I am sorry to hear that. Even in America, there are those who do not have a car."

She reached for the nearest chair at once, and that he was sitting in the nearest chair at once. "Have a chair, Weber. Sit down. She's up in her room."

"We could talk a moment first," he asked quickly.
"Of course." She tried to say it warmly, but it was difficult. She could not imagine why this young man should want to speak to her, and she did not especially care. She had had enough of Jim's friends for one morning, enough of everyone. The quiet, lonely hideout was what she needed. But she said, "Of course."

Weber sat down on the glider, not rocking it. He seemed confident, yet not ill at ease, whereas all the American young people she knew were ill at ease with adults without being in the least diffident. Of course he was older than any of Ann's friends, or even Jim's, twenty-three or four, she judged.

"The house at home is not unlike this," he said, looking up at the windows. "Not so large, I think, but with more acres." He took out his wallet and extracted a snapshot. "Y u can see a little of it there in the back. That is my mother and my small sister."

Ann looked down at a thin, large featured woman with a round-headed child of five or six on her lap. A dog lay on the lawn at their feet.

"They look nice," she murmured.

"They are." He put the picture back in his wallet. "My father is not alive. He was killed in the war. Always he wanted to come to America, so I have come in his place." He smiled. "My sister came first. She married an American soldier, Robert Johnson, who works now in an airplane factory. That was the reason my mother here, but she likes rather to stay in Germany. She is not young, you see, as you are, though perhaps in years. I do not know . . ." He hurried on, as though afraid of interruption. "My grandfather was the mayor of our town. Also he wrote a story which was published in the 'newspaper.' He

laughed softly. "I don't know," he said, "but he seems to have finished. He is up at the window, looking out, waiting for her to say something. She must be what he expected her to say. She looked at him and gave him that tentative smile, and she thought, Oh, for heaven's sake, I'm only a boy."

"Are you giving me references?" she asked him gently. "References?"

"So that I'll feel it's all right for Ann to know you?"

He seemed embarrassed now. He looked down at his polished shoes. "I thought perhaps you had forbidden me to go out with me. I can understand this. You knew nothing about me, where I am from or who my people are."

How, she wondered, did they all get the notion that she was so influential? First Libby, and now this boy. Perhaps that was what they were looking for, what they wanted—the mother who put her foot down, the stern, forbidding father. Now, then. Maybe there was not enough security in parents who were afraid to stop you from leading your own life.

"Ann chooses her friends herself," he said. "I rely on her judgment." What do I know about her judgment? she thought. Really? Surely if she invited you here today, you must know I can't have disapproved."

"She did not exactly invite me. I have asked her so many times if I may take her out, and always she avoids it. This time I said only that I am coming if I can borrow the car." He looked earnestly toward Zelda. "At camp she is very pleasant to me. She seems to like me very much. That is why I thought—"

"Ann's pretty young, Gerhardt," Zelda broke in. "Maybe she feels you're too old for her."

He laughed. "But I am only twenty-four!"

"Yes, I know. That isn't very old. But Ann has always gone with boys her own age, in her own class in school."

"Like Bill?"

"You mean Bill?"

"The boy who was with you when you were in the hospital?"

"Yes, but you aren't a child."

He shook his head. "My grandmother was the wife of a man who was hostess to all the important citizens of the town when she was as old as Ann."

"Different now, Gerhardt. It's different here, anything that used to stretch out longer than it used to, childhood, youth, and so on."

"Do you think this is good?"

"I don't know. I only know that's how it is, and whether it's good or bad, we have to deal with it."

He leaned back in the glider, and now he began to swing a little. "I have seen this. I understand what you mean. Even with my sister. She is more than thirty years old, but I have seen her cry if her husband comes home late from work and they cannot go to a party." He looked suddenly at Zelda. "You too. When I came before and saw you here I thought that this could not be the mother, this slender lady in the girl's dress. But I know now that this is how mothers look here." He smiled. "I think it is quite charming."

"You are quite charming yourself, she thought, you and your winning candor. Ann is a little dope."

She stood up. "I'll tell Ann you're here."

He was on his feet at once. "Thank you. Thank you for our little talk. I have enjoyed it very much." His eyes twinkled. "But do not think, though, that Ann is a child."

Zelda went inside. Tony was in the dining room with the paper spread out on the table. He was looking over the ads, and he did not glance up. Jim was still not home.

For the moment she was not thinking of Tony and Jim. She was thinking of Ann, being Ann. She was seventeen, going on eighteen, and an attractive man was waiting for her on the terrace. Not Bill, not a gawky boy, but a man with a good smile and a way about him, an Old World background and a charming

manner of speech, the way he looked at her? A
boy who didn't even shine his shoes by the door
for her. If Gerhardt was as nice as he seemed—if he
wasn't (what did he do, anyway?)—maybe eventually it would
develop into something serious.

Oh, my! she thought, and laughed. Oh, my! How could
you get? She ran up the stairs (after forty, take stairs
and knocked on Ann's door. 'There was no answer. What
was asleep, even at one o'clock in the afternoon, no knock
wake her.

Zelda went into the room. Ann was lying on her stomach
across the bed in her white jersey and tennis shorts. Her hair
was damp and tangled and the visible part of her face, which
was pressed into the pillow, was flushed. She looked
though she had been crying.

Over Bill, probably. One of their childish quarrels. There
was a time when Ann had told her about them, not so much for
comfort, Zelda had always thought, as to say the things that
she had the wit to say to Bill at the time. "He said I mustn't
talk, so I told him to try a dose of Frances Gavin (that's Bill's
girl who likes him) once daily after dinner." Zelda doubted that she
had told him any such thing. But if Ann wanted to try her
parades d'escalier on her, Zelda was happy to listen and
at least it had given her some idea what was going on. Really,
Ann had been as withdrawn as Jim.

Maybe it would be different now. Maybe, with an older girl,
she would be less confident, eager for help. There was a girl
Zelda could tell her. She could tell her how to have a girl
coming out of her hand. Could I? she thought. Or could I
tell her how to turn him to another girl?

She shook this off and leaned over the bed, speaking softly
and gently. Ann did not stir. Her head was bent into the
pillow so that her neck had the same exposed, vulnerable look

as she looked over her shoulder. Zelda looked it gently and calmly.

Ann jumped from the bed, pushing Zelda aside. She stood shaking in flushed, heavy-lidded confusion, impossible to tell which—saying, "Get out of here! Get out of here!" in a hoarse voice.

Ann took a step toward her. "Aun, dear, it's mother. I must have been dreaming."

"I don't have nightmares," Ann said sullenly. "You told me so. I never have nightmares." She sat down on the edge of the bed, rubbing her eyes. "Please leave me alone."

For a moment Zelda was sure she was doped up. All the theories she had read in the newspapers and magazines were swirling through her mind . . . Teen-Age Narcotic Addiction . . . It Could Be Your Child . . .

"Ann," she said. "Ann, what's the matter? Are you sick?" She spoke her voice as quiet as she could. "Whatever it is, you know I can tell me."

The girl did not look at her. "I'm all right." She sounded quite normal. "I woke up too suddenly, I guess. You startled me." She pushed the damp hair back from her face and began combing it with her fingers. "What time is it?"

"It's fine," Zelda thought. It's nothing. But she found herself staring surreptitiously at the bare, brown arms. What's wrong with me? she thought. What kind of confused silliness is this?

"It's one o'clock," she said. "Gerhardt Weber is down downstairs waiting for you."

Ann seemed to consider this. "All right," she said then, with a burst of enthusiasm. "Tell him I'll be down in a few minutes." She turned and went to the mirror. "Gee, I look awful!"

That was so typical, so healthy-sounding that Zelda laughed. "I disagree with you," she said. "Take your time and make it up pretty. I'll entertain Gerhardt." She winked at Ann and said, "He's sharp," and caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. She said it. She looked like a lewd old Madam.

thought, talking up side of the mirror, when she thought was
to be a little more.

She thought, talking up side of the mirror, when she thought
was to be a little more.

When the door had closed, Ann took the brush from her
hair and began to punish her hair with hard, raging
brush. *He's sharp*, she thought. *He's sharp*. People didn't even
brush more. It wasn't even modern. Why did she have
expressions like that? Why didn't she act—?

She stopped in the middle of the thought and the brush
dropped. She was being silly. This wasn't what she was
about. She didn't know what it was. Too much sleep, probably.
Her mother said she slept too much, and it was probably
she got tired all the time. The trouble was she didn't feel
better when she woke up. Sometimes she felt worse, like
now. Maybe a shower would help. She got up and took off her
clothes and then stood for a moment looking herself over in the
full-length mirror. Maybe at college she would go on a diet.
They said the food was lousy anyway. You couldn't sleep much
at college, either. You had to study a lot—sometimes, even
all night, most of the night. A girl she knew who had been a
freshman last year said the fellow at the Drug would give her
something to keep you awake, benzadrine or something. It was
supposed to be harmless.

She stayed in the shower a long time, trying to keep her mind
on college, but she couldn't. You'd think you'd be able to do
anything you wanted to with your mind, but sometimes it was
as if it had some separate existence that had nothing to do with
you at all, and you could not stop it from going off on its own.
If only her mother hadn't waked her like that—if only she
hadn't kept after her—are you sick what's the matter you can't
do anything what's the matter . . .

When she had come in from tennis, her mother had just been
down to breakfast. She had smiled and asked her if she

had had a good time, and Ann had felt a wave of love for her, and she had thought the more of it, the more she was going to tell her. But now, when she had gone on down into the kitchen, and Ann had said maybe she'd better wait until she'd had her coffee, she was waiting, she had decided she might as well wait at the bus stop. The time went faster when you were asleep.

She didn't see now how she could have thought she could make it to her mother. *He's sharp... He's sharp...*

What was Gerry doing here, anyhow? Why did he keep asking her when she never would make a date with him? Maybe she shouldn't go out there at all. Maybe she'd sneak through the back and take the bus downtown and stay away until dinnertime. That's the way she had done that time when she left Wilma's.

She turned off the water and wrapped herself in a towel. She didn't want to think about that, but she couldn't stop her mind. She began singing as loud as she could, trying to drown it out, but she couldn't stop it.

She had never in her life been out at five o'clock in the morning. Even the light looked dangerous, like in one of those English movies where the killer was stalking someone through the London streets. For a minute, standing on the deserted sidewalk, she thought of going back inside. Wilma was asleep and wouldn't even know she had gone and come back. But almost as soon as the idea came to her, she began to run, with no idea where she was heading.

She ran until she was out of breath, and then she walked, telling herself that she was silly, that there was nothing to be afraid of. The sun was beginning to come up, and she was only a few miles from home.

She had almost convinced herself when a man spoke to her from a doorway. She didn't know what he said, but she began to run again, and only when her throat was bursting did she look back to see that he had not followed her. It seemed hours before she found a policeman and asked how to get to the bus stop. The way he looked at her, she thought maybe he was going to arrest her.

her or something, but she was only an old woman, and she was
old. She was only an old woman.

She began to run again, but not because she was
because she was so glad to be home. Her mother
would be up in another hour; they never slept late.
She wouldn't even mind if she woke them now.

A strange car was in the driveway. When she went to
wondering who was there at that hour, she saw Rena
had on a pink silk robe that Marcia had given her. It
wrapped around her almost twice. A big, dark-skinned man
in a taxi driver's cap had her bent back against the porch railing,
kissing her. They were just above the spot where Ann had seen
her father kissing Mrs. Dellett.

Ann ran back to the end of the road and took the next
town. She had breakfast in the coiffeur shop and waited
until the stores opened. Later she went to a movie. When
there was kissing she closed her eyes. By the time she
came, at the usual hour she arrived from camp every day,
it was all right.

Well, she wasn't going to do that again, wander around
herself all day; there was no sense to it. She might as well
go on and see Gerry and get it over with. She didn't mind
Gerry. He was nice. Only sometimes when she was with him
made her feel as if he were hurrying her some place that
she didn't want to go. He was quiet enough, and not fast
enough—it wasn't that. She didn't know what it was.

She took a blue linen dress out of her closet and
put it back, rattling the hanger as she hanged it on the
rod. It was warm for jeans, but she put them on anyway, and
put them up to her calves. With them she wore a red and
black striped shirt and loafers without socks. She tied her hair
in a horsetail with a red ribbon, dabbed lipstick on her
lips, and went downstairs.

She could hear her mother laughing as she reached the door.
Her mother's dress was blue with a little round collar.

wide, flat, and the grass from the College Shop. It was a honey of a day. The sun was just beginning to set and the air was just what it, he thought, sometimes even a bit. If it were, it would be a little through the middle.

Her mother looked at her. For a minute Ann thought she was going to say something in front of Gerry about the way she was dressed. For some reason Ann wished she would, though it would have infuriated her if she had. It was as though she was about to be furious. Sometimes she thought she was a little bit of a

"You're dear," her mother said. "You look nice and rested." Ann wouldn't say anything. Not until later. You were never supposed to criticize your children publicly, particularly if they were adolescents, because adolescents were very sensitive. Her mother knew all about that. She kept up with things. "You're dear," Ann said, making it a general greeting. She glanced at Gerry. "Sit down, Gerry, for pete's sake." She flung her self a canvas chin and kicked off her loafers. Why am I acting like this? she thought. "You're so polite you make me nervous."

She could hear how the creaminess of her mother's voice made her own sound raucous. "Would you like a cold drink, Gerry? Hard? A coke? Beer? A Tom Collins?"

"Oh, thank you," Gerry said. "I had hoped Ann would come for a drink with me and we could stop somewhere."

"Oh, no," Ann said indifferently, without looking at him. He was nothing for a minute. "I thought, perhaps—my sister told me the place for dinner where you sit on a porch and there are flowers and also music. I thought, if you would like to come with me, it sounds like a pleasant place."

"I don't know," Ann said. "I'm sort of tired."

Her mother laughed unnaturally. "But darling, you've been sitting for hours. How can you be tired?"

She was tired. She didn't know why she said she was, why she was being like this. Out of the corner of her eye she could see that Gerry was watching her, though she couldn't see the

expression on his face. She sat down for him. She felt sorry for her mother, and for herself, and for Bill. She was so awful, and maybe even a little bit crazy.

"I don't know how I can be, but I am," she said.

Gerry stood up. "Perhaps you would like me to go."

She was going to say that he could suit himself, but she didn't have to say anything, because a car stopped in front of the house and a whistle shrilled, and she yelled at the top of her voice, "Hi, Bill! On the terrace!"

She could hear him coming up the flagstone walk, clattering his feet, his loafers slapping. He always walked like that, as if he could hardly pull himself along, but on a tennis court or a basketball court he was so fast you would never know it was the same person. He had blown his top this morning because she wouldn't go after some of the balls she could see she couldn't get anyhow. "I'm running my game playing with you all the time," he had told her. They had had a fight about it, but she knew the fight hadn't really been about tennis at all.

He came on to the terrace with his hands in the pockets of his dungarees, trying to look as if he didn't care whether he was there or not. "Hi" he said, and then stopped, seeing her mother and Gerry, and said, "Oh. Hello."

She knew him so well. She knew him better than anybody, she guessed, even better than she knew herself. Poor Bill.

"I wasn't expecting you," she said.

"No," he said. "I guess not."

He sat down in the nearest chair. It was one of those modern, low-slung ones, built something like a hammock, new Bill's son. Bill looked all doubled up in it, his bottom almost on the ground and his knees up to his chin. She wanted to laugh at seeing him like that, and at the same time she wanted to cry. She was crazy.

"Would you like a coke, Bill?" her mother asked.

"No," he said. "No, thanks, I guess not."

He wanted one, all right. He could always drink a coke. He drank about ten a day. But her mother knew that. She smiled

and said, "Well, maybe if I bring one out, you'll change your mind."

Perhaps they supposed to be nice to their children's friends, so the mother could be glad to come to the house instead of meeting on their corners. Why would anybody want to meet on street corners? There wasn't even any place to sit down.

Her mother went into the house, being nice to her friends, and Gerry looked after her. "She is a most attractive woman, your mother," he said. "Most charming. Isn't this so, Bill?"

Bill looked surprised. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, she's okay."

"She seems almost like a young girl," Gerry said.

Bill didn't answer. Ann was sure her mother did not seem like any young girl to him.

"This must be a fine thing," Gerry said. "I mean for a girl to have so young a mother, as if she were a friend or a sister."

"She's like anybody else," Ann said. "Like most of my friends' mothers. There's no trick to staying that thin when you smoke the way she does and don't eat enough."

"It is not only that she is thin."

Bill hoisted himself out of the chair and sat on the glider, pushing it back and forth as fast as it would go. "Say, Ann, can I talk to you a minute?"

"Sure. Go ahead. We've got free speech."

"No." He scowled down at the flagstones. "I am alone."

"I will go in to help your mother," Gerry said.

Before he could go, her mother came out with a tray, and Gerry, trying to take it from her. She had brought glasses and bottles of coke and beer and a dish of pretzel sticks. Be nice to your children's friends.

Ann and Bill had cokes and Gerry had beer. Her mother ate a pretzel stick. Sure, if you starved yourself you could stay thin.

"Say, Ann," Bill said in a loud voice, "how about you and me going down to the beach for a swim?"

"Well, really, Bill, after all," Ann said. "You can see I've got company."

"Yeah," he said, and his mother looked at him. "Somebody was kidding." "That's what I thought."

His nose was peeling again. All summer long it peeled, and then he got it burned again and then it peeled some more. Once he had tried wearing one of those white paper nose covers, but that had looked even worse than the peeling, and she had made him take it off.

"The beer is good," Gerry said. "I did not know I was so thirsty." He sighed a little and smiled, looking up at the sky, holding the half empty glass. "Everything is good here. I hope it shall never change."

"Things always change," Ann's mother said.

He nodded. "If only it is slowly, so that one gets used to it and does not notice. But I am just able to catch my breath now for a little while. I would not wish to be all upheaved again."

"Nobody wishes to be upheaved," Ann's mother said. She was quiet for a minute. Then she smiled at Gerry. "Don't worry, Gerhard. You'll be all right here. I believe there's a core that nothing can touch."

"A core?" He thought a little. "It is strength?"

"Not exactly. I was thinking of what Thomas Gray called the unconquerable mind and freedom's holy flame."

"The unconquerable—" One moment, please." He took a pencil and a little notebook from his pocket and began writing. "Please tell this to me again."

The glider screamed. "Say, Ann, will you come out to the car a minute?" Bill said. "I've got something there I want to show you."

"Oh, all right," she said in a bored voice.

He walked out ahead of her, shuffling his feet. The skin of his head was sunburned, the scalp pink under the stubble of his touch haircut. She had once seen a newborn baby with a rash like that.

He went halfway down the walk and then he turned and looked at her, standing with his hands hanging at his sides. His

whole face moved, as if he was trying to say something and his voice wouldn't come, but when he did speak all he said was:

"Let's go to the beach."

"For what, then, how can I? I can't just go off and leave him sitting there, can I?"

"He isn't even talking to you. He's talking to your mother."

"It isn't a private conversation. Anybody can get into it."

"Who wants to?"

"Well, you wouldn't, of course. You never want to talk about anything intelligent."

This was not an unusual insult. Ordinarily he would have come back fast with one of his own. But now he just glanced at her and then looked down at the ground.

"Okay," he said. "Okay, go on back there then, if you want to. I'm leaving."

He did not leave, however. He stood there waiting for her to say something that would make everything all right again, and she longed to say it, but she couldn't.

"I have to get dressed anyhow," she said. "He's taking me out to dinner."

Bill's head came up and the sunburn faded from his cheeks. For a moment she thought she could see what he was going to look like when he was grown up.

"Then I guess we're not going steady any more," he said, "are we?"

All she had to do was tell him she wouldn't go with Gerry. It would be easy. She could make an excuse to Gerry, tell him she'd promised to go to the beach with Bill and forgotten. He would take it all right—and what if he didn't?

She and Bill would go way down to their place at the end of the beach, where hardly anybody ever went. They would walk out on the rocks in their bare feet, not even feeling the sharp edges because their soles were so calloused from many summers of walking on the rocks, and they would sit and watch the boats and talk. Other summers they had talked about school, about Mr. Landman who always gave the girls better marks than he

gave the boys, and about Joe Wickett, twenty years old and still not out of high school, and about the school he voted Best Teacher of the Year. Clara and about the way she could get Miss Thorncliffe to tell them the questions she was going to ask on a history test. When they were so warm they could hardly stand it, they would dive into the cold, salty, murky pond, and race, and splash each other, and grab each other's legs under the water . . .

"Don't be silly," she said. "Gerry doesn't count. He's only four years old."

"So he's twenty-four years old. If you'd rather go with him than me, he counts all right."

"Okay, if that's the way you want to take it."

"What other way can I take it?"

She watched him start toward the car, and she could have stopped him, but instead she turned and went back to the terrace. Her mother and Gerry were talking and laughing. Her mother had a glass of beer now too, and she must have just been drinking it, because there was a moustache of foam on her lips that evaporated as Ann watched. Bill's car started in front of the house, and Ann spoke in a high voice, as if she had to make herself heard above it.

"I'll get dressed now. I'll be ready in a few minutes, Gerry," she laughed, without knowing why. "Did you say there were swans? I love swans."

Gerry smiled at her. "They are beautiful, but they can be cruel and mean. I have heard of someone who had the tip of a finger bitten off by a swan."

She thought he might be talking about her. Beautiful, but cruel and mean. Maybe that was the way she was turning out. It was kind of exciting, she thought as she went up to her room. Like Rebecca, or Catherine de Medici. She looked at herself in the mirror, and wrinkled her nose in disgust. Beautiful, but cruel. She didn't look cruel either. Her face was too round and she had freckles, and eyes like caramels.

There were snapshots stuck all around in the corners of the

mirror. Joan, her best friend, in the white dress she had worn when she graduated from Junior High. Joan and herself, eating Good Humor on the school steps. Marlon Brando, cut short of a movie, standing without a shirt on. Bill. There were lots of pictures of Bill. There was one of him kissing her the night of the Junior Prom. Donald Porter had taken it with a flash bulb, and they'd had to pay him a dollar for the negative. Ann had kept the print hidden in her diary for a while, but then she had taken it out and put it in the mirror with the others, because it really wasn't anything. Unless you looked closely, you couldn't even tell they were kissing.

There was a little corner of torn white paper stuck in the frame between a picture of Joan and one of Bill. She hadn't noticed it before. It was from another snapshot that had been there all summer until a few days ago. She took a nail-file and rubbed it out and then scraped around thoroughly inside the frame until she was sure there was nothing left. When she had finished, she began to shiver.

I'm not going, she thought. I'm not going out with Gerry. I'm not going out with anyone. I'm never going out with anyone.

The words began to make a song inside her head. I'm never going out with anyone, she could hear Jo Stafford singing it, love and husky and sad. Then it turned into Calypso. I'm never going out with anyone, because everybody makes me sick and I'd rather be stone cold dead in the market . . .

She rhode-rafig, and she went into her mother's room to change it. She thought it might be Bill, but she didn't want it to be Bill. If he said, "Say, look, it's okay. I don't care if you go out to dinner with him," she didn't know how she would answer. He might say that, and she didn't want him to say it. She wanted it not to be Bill, and yet when it wasn't, she was a little disappointed.

The voice was low and quiet and at the same time crisp. You could not mistake it. Her father said it was a voice like perfectly done toast.

"It could be Mr. Nye," Ann said

She went to the window that overlooked the terrace and told her mother she was wanted on the phone. At the sound of her voice, both of the faces on the terrace lifted to her, and for a moment she felt like a priestess or something, standing way up above them, looking down at them. Her mother asked, "Who is it?" and when Ann told her, all the silly bright laughter went out of her face and she looked the way she was supposed to, old enough to be Gerry's mother. Gerry, to whom the name was only a sound Ann had made, smiled at her and raised his glass a little. It was so out of place, though of course he didn't know, that she withdrew from the window and pretended not to see him.

She was hanging over the stairwell when her mother came up, but she couldn't say anything after all. What could she say? I forgot about Mr. Nye. I forgot about all that. I thought it was finished with. No, I didn't think that. I was just trying not to think anything about it, because it was too much. There have been too many other things.

Her mother went into her room and shut the door, and Ann returned to her own room and began getting dressed. She would go with Gerry, because her mother would like it and she wanted to please her mother now, on account of Mr. Nye.

At least she thought that was why she was going. She was never sure of her motives any more. She was never sure of anything about herself. Sometimes she thought she might not even be Ann Halliday at all, but somebody else who looked like her and wore her skin. Maybe Ann had died, and another soul had entered her body. It was supposed to be the body that died first, but nobody really knew. Maybe in some cases you could have a lot of different souls in one lifetime. Or it was possible that she didn't exist at all, except in her own mind, that nobody really knew she was there, and that the people she saw and talked to came out of her own head . . .

Her mother knocked on the door and came in and sat down on the bed. "I thought you'd be almost ready," she said, but she did not seem to be thinking of what she was saying. She looked pale.

She looked terrible. She kept puffing at her cigarette as if she were afraid it was going out.

"What did Mr. Nye want?" Ann asked her.

"He wants to see me again tomorrow. I thought he was all finished." She wadded up a Kleenex and used it for an ash tray. Some day she was going to start a fire like that. "It's getting to be a nuisance," she said. "I wish Lex had gone somewhere else this summer."

Her mother was talking like this again, as though they were the same age. Other times, when she said she was talking to her this way - "Let's not discuss it as mother and daughter but as two human beings, friends"—it didn't turn out like that. It was a hard thing to keep up with.

"What do you suppose he'll ask you this time?"

Her mother shrugged. "He's asked me everything in the book. I suppose it will be more of the same."

He couldn't have come to the point about Mrs. Dellett yet, Ann thought, because nothing had changed between her mother and father. Maybe tomorrow he would ask, "Do you know that your husband kissed Mrs. Dellett and called her 'darling'?" Do you know they had an affair?"

When you were over a certain age, you could decide which parent you wanted to live with. Llav Cameron had chosen her mother, but now she was sorry because her mother drank all the time, and still she couldn't just go and leave her. Ann wondered whether her mother would become an alcoholic. It might be better to choose her father. Maybe her father would marry Mrs. Dellett, though. Well, maybe she could stay at college all the time and spend holidays with other girls and get jobs in the summer. College girls could be waitresses at summer hotels and earn a lot of money, as much as \$100 a month.

"Ann, for heaven's sake!" Her mother laughed. "You're asleep with your eyes open. Even poor Gerhardt's patience will give out if you don't get down there soon." She looked at Ann in the mirror. She did not seem pale any more. "My mother would have given me a tonic. Something called Fellowes Hypophor-

phates. We drank it in a little water after every meal, and it was so bitter we felt it must be doing some good. Wellows Hydrobromide!" She laughed again. "Anyway, it's cheaper than a psychiatrist."

Ann got up and looked in her closet. "What do you think I should wear?" Don't tell me it's up to me. Don't tell me that's a decision I'll have to make for myself. Don't—

"Something glamorous," her mother said. "He's never seen you glamorous, has he?"

This was another way her mother was. They were the same she now too, but now it was Ann's age.

"I haven't anything glamorous."

"Let's see." Her mother came and looked too. She took out the white linen and held it against Ann. "This, with your hair. I'll lend you my gold belt and maybe gold earrings. Come on, try it! I think you'll be sensational."

She was all excited. She kept talking while Ann dressed, running back and forth to her room for things. Anybody would have thought Ann had never had a date before.

"I'm so glad you decided to go," she said. "For a while out there I could have strangled you. That attractive boy, and you were acting like such a brat. But it didn't seem to discourage him. Maybe he liked it. How does anybody ever know, with men?" She smoothed a little tinted cream from a bottle over Ann's nose, and the freckles disappeared. "He's pretty taken with you, you know. How do you feel about him?"

"He's okay."

"I realize I'm not supposed to ask. Can't we forget Joan for once? Close your eyes and pretend I'm Joan."

Ann felt sorry for her. All day she had been feeling sorry for everybody. I guess I'd have to go with her, she thought. I could quit daddy whenever I felt like it.

"He's old," she said. "He's twenty-four."

"If he doesn't care, I don't see why you should. I'd have given my eye teeth to go out with a twenty four year old man when I was seventeen. The best I could do was twenty-two," she smiled.

and lit another cigarette. "His name was Stephen, and he said I had more than Clara Bow, and that I was the strangest combination of old and young he'd ever seen. That was because I told him I was nineteen, but sometimes I forgot to act it." She sucked the cigarette in the corner of her mouth while she helped Ann put the dress over her head. "He wasn't a foreigner, though. This is much more exciting."

Her mother looked at her and then laughed. "That's a good question. I don't know. We used to think it was. Society girls were always marrying foreigners with titles, and most of the Hollywood favorites had accents. I guess because the world was bigger then. A Frenchman or an Austrian was somebody far off and mysterious. You couldn't get to him in a matter of hours, and he hardly ever came over here, certainly not to live. I guess that's why."

Ann fastened the gold belt around her waist. It was a little tight, but if she held herself in, it would be all right. She looked okay. As a matter of fact, she looked absolutely wonderful.

"Darling, you're terrific," her mother said. "I've never seen you like this. You go down, and I'll stand up at the window and watch Gerhardt's eyes bug out."

Ann kissed her carefully so as not to smear her lipstick. She went part way down the stairs and then stopped for a minute, trying to hold on to the feeling of herself. It was getting away from her again, and she did not know who she was going to be now. Not the same Ann, certainly, who had kicked off her loafers on the terrace. Now her eyes felt heavy from the earrings, and her middle felt tight from the gold belt and everything was different.

As she came down, her father looked around from the newspaper he had spread out on the dining room table. He pushed back his chair and whistled. She wondered whether he had ever whistled at Mrs. Dellett like that. But she didn't want to think about it. She didn't want to start thinking about any of that again.

"What's happened to you, baby?" he said. "You've aged five years since I saw you last. Bill will fall flat on his face."

He never knew what was going on. Sometimes he listened and acted interested, but he never remembered. It had been months before he stopped forgetting Bill's name. She didn't see how it could be much fun to be thinking about the advertising business all the time, so that you weren't even sure who your daughter's friends were.

"I'm not going out with Bill," she said. "I'm going with Gerhardt Weber. He's waiting for me on the terrace. Would you like to meet him?"

He shook his head. "Let's spare us both. I never know what to say to them and they certainly don't know what to say to me. But how come? About Bill, I mean? I thought you two were an old settled couple."

"Oh, Gerry doesn't count," she said. "He just stopped by, and I had nothing to do. He's much older than I am, twenty-four."

"Ah, well. Bill can relax, then. It's almost as though you were going out with your grandfather, isn't it?" He grinned. He was laughing at her, but she didn't mind so much. He wasn't sarcastic like her mother, not in the same way, anyhow. She felt as if he were on her side, even though in a little while he might not remember much of what they had said. "Are you trying to kid somebody, baby?" he asked.

She laughed and blew him a kiss. She was the lovely young daughter, blowing a kiss to her dear old father, tripping out to meet her date. On the walk to the terrace she slowed down again. Her date, she thought. And it wasn't Bill. For the first time in almost two years, she was going out with someone else. Of course it didn't really count.

Are you trying to kid somebody, baby?

On his way home from the station, Jim stopped off at Nat Tillman's garage. Nat kept open on Sundays because otherwise he said he could never catch up with his work. He didn't take a

day off except once a year, when he closed up his place for two weeks and went fishing somewhere in the Maine woods.

"I used to take off Sundays," he told Jim once. "After I was through readin' the paper, what was I gonna do? I got no family to talk to, or nuthin'. So where do I find myself? Out in the gay-rags, foolin' around with the car. Even when there was nuthin' wrong with it, I'd fool around. So if I was gonna do that, why not get paid for it?"

Jim found him with his head under the hood of an old Packard. He did not look up when he heard Jim's footsteps.

"A minute, please," he said. "I'll be right with you."

Jim waited without speaking, leaning against another car and watching Nat's big, deft hands. The smell of gas and grease and sweat brought back the summer he had worked here, and he could remember how it felt; he could feel that way now, thinking about it, loose inside, empty of everything except the car he was working on, nothing to him but hands and eyes.

"Yes, sir?" Nat said, lifting his head. He was a big, weather-beaten Swede who could have been fifty or seventy. His eyes were bright blue and his hair was so fair that whatever white hairs he had were lost in its blondness.

"Jim, for crimony gee! Why didn't you speak up?"

Jim grinned. Nobody had ever heard Nat swear in any accepted fashion, but he had a collection of quaint, coined expressions which he could make sound singularly obscene. He was considered a character, and he played it up for all it was worth.

"I'm in no hurry. I was watchin' Jim." He stared back to his jalopy. "Little Schmoie needs spark plugs."

"Well, help yourself. You know where they are. No, wait. I'll change your plugs, if you'll take a look at this old son-of-a-suck-monger. He's got a knock like nuthin' you ever heard, and I can't find the clipperin' thing. A pig, that's what he is. A real pig."

Jim shifted his weight. "If you can't find it, Nat, nobody can."

"What's the matter? You too clipperin' fancy these days to stick your head inside a car? I heard you was down to New

York now, desk-aquatin'." He shook his head. "A squeamish shame, that's what it is, a natural good mechanic like you."

"Shut up!" Jim said. "All I came in here for was to get my spark plugs changed. Do you always tell your customers that?" He stopped. Tullson was looking at him with his mouth open. "I'm sorry, Nat. I didn't mean that."

"That's all right." The big man turned his back to him and bent over the Packard again. "Just help yourself to the spare tools, or wait till I'm through this job, if you want, and I'll change 'em for you."

"Nat." Jim moved to his side, leaning against the Packard's mudguard. "Nat, let me look at it."

"No, I don't guess I want you to."

"I didn't mean it, I tell you. I'm all loused up this summer. Everything's all cockeyed. I don't know what I'm saying half the time."

Nat did not answer. Jim stood there waiting, and he didn't know why it was so important, why he cared what this big dumb Swede thought or said.

Nat spoke finally, without looking up. "Women?"

"Yes. Partly."

"What happened to that one used to come around here? That one like a pony?"

"Like a pony? You mean Libby?"

"That's the one. Used to stand and watch you and sort of wave her mane. What happened to her?"

"She's around," Jim said. "I don't see her so much any more."

Pony, he thought. Goddam. She was like a pony at that. "I'm engaged."

Nat came up out of the car. His hands were black with grease. The grease soaked into you all over when you worked around a garage, into your pores and your hair and up your nostrils, sitting with the oil and the sweat, and a shower never felt so good as it did after the day was over.

"Engaged, huh?" Nat said. "Who to?"

"A New York girl. Nobody knows it yet."

"Yeah," Nat said.

"My father doesn't like her. He'd try to stop it if he knew about it. Not that he could. But she won't marry me until we can get his approval, and I'll be Goddamned if I'm going to suck around for it."

He hadn't told all this to Libby. He didn't know why, the hell he was telling it to Tillson.

"No," Nat said.

"It makes it tough. I don't know what to do. Every damn thought up in the air. Next year this time, maybe I'll be in Korea and so what the hell?"

"Yeah," Nat said. "Next year this time, maybe I'll be six feet under. Here." He tossed Jim a heavy wrench, so unexpectedly that Jim almost missed it and got it in the stomach. "Look, see if you can find what's the matter with this squeamish pig."

Jim went in back and got into a pair of coveralls. He worked under the hood of the Packard for a while, and then he rolled himself underneath on a board and lay on his back, looking up into the bowels of the car. He knew he was going to find the trouble. He didn't know how he knew it, but he did.

If he were Nat Tillson's son, he'd probably be finished with his army hitch by now, and this was where he'd be, working here in his father's garage until some day he'd take it over. This would be his life, all settled.

How much did Tillson make out of this place? he wondered. Not as much as Hallie's salary, he bet. Hallie darling, how would you like to be married to a garage mechanic? . . . Professor Ingersoll, this is my husband, Jap, who works in a garage. 'How interesting!' Do you know the derivation of mechanic? It's from an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning scum.

He eased the wrench up carefully, settling it where he wanted it, feeling it competent and responsive in his hands. The tightness went out of him. His arms ached, but he did not know. He knew nothing but this engine, this old squeamish pig of an engine.

When he rolled himself out, more than an hour later, Nat had

another car up on the grease rack. He glanced at Jim. "You're all set for spark plugs."

"Thanks. The Packard's all set too." Jim rubbed his blackened hands slowly up and down the legs of the coverall. "You want to try it?"

"I don't need to, if you say so. I knew you'd fix it."

Jim went to change. He grinned at his streaked face in the mirror. He looked bad enough anyhow, but the mirror distorted his features and emphasized the dirt. It was one of those metal mirrors they used in the army.

"Say, Nat," Jim said, coming back out, rolling down his sleeves. "You were in the first war, weren't you?"

"I was in a war. Not the first, by a bombight. They said it was gonna be the last, but it wasn't that neither."

"Did you enlist?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"How the criminy cripes should I know? All those years ago. Maybe I wanted to be a simmerin' hero." He lowered the car on the grease rack. "You ever want a job, come around, hear? Like I said, you're a natural."

"Thanks, Nat."

"Nat looked at him. "You rather do that desk-squattin'?"

"It's my father's business, and it's there. I won't have to worry about money. You see, my father's a very smart guy. He makes money with his brains. So I have to make money with my brains too, or lots of people won't like it."

"Yeah," Nat said. "That guy wouldn't like it."

"You see how it is. Next year I'll graduate from college. When you're a college graduate and your father's a smart man and you live in Underwood Park, you've got to work with your brains. You see how it is."

"Yeah," Nat said. "I see. That's a lotta reasons."

"I'd be a Goddam fool," Jim said. "The business is right there for me."

"Yeah," Nat said.

"You big, dumb Swede!" Jim shouted. "Can't you say anything but 'Yeah'?"

He flung himself into his car and backed out with a roar. He was crazy to have come here in the first place and spilled all that stuff to Tillson. What did Nat Tillson know? All he knew was cars. He couldn't even speak good English. It was crazy to have come here and shot his mouth off and fiddled around with that Packard. What did he want to fix somebody's Packard for? He wasn't any Goddam grease monkey. He was an advertising man. He was engaged to Hallie Breed. He ate lunch at Whitney's, where Max, the head waiter, called him by name. "One extra dry Martini, Mr. Halliday?" But anyhow he had fixed that old Packard.

A trickle of sweat ran down his back. He parked the car and went into a drug store for a coke. When he had finished it, he called up Nat Tillson from the pay station.

"Say, Nat, this is Jim," he said. "I forgot to pay you for the plugs."

"I'll send you a bill."

"Well, okay." He began to sweat again as if he had never had the coke. "Listen, Nat, I don't know what the hell's the matter with me. Talking to you like that."

"Forget it. Everybody calls me a big, dumb Swede."

"But not me, Nat. I don't feel that way. I just don't know what the hell's the matter with me."

"When you find out," Nat said, "come around," and he hung up.

Jim went back to the fountain and ordered another coke. He drank it in three gulps, and nausea swam into his throat. He had had too much to drink last night that was it. He always drank too damn much at Elaine's parties. Everybody was so clever, and he couldn't just sit there. Those were the people who were going to be their friends when they were married. After a few drinks, he was clever too. If he watched Hallie's eyes, he could always tell when he was doing all right. It took a few drinks.

"Say, Mac," he said to the fountain boy, "give me an Alka-Seltzer."

He watched the white tablet dissolve in the water, erupting into frantic bubbles. It reminded him of an experiment he had done once with a chemistry kit somebody had given him when he was eleven or twelve. The stuff had cracked the test tube and seamed all over the floor and damn near scared him to death. Imagine drinking this glup, he thought, but when he had it down he felt better.

He got in his car again and drove slowly out of the village. He didn't remember much about the end of last night's party, but they were all alike anyhow. Everybody was very clever, and the more they drank the cleverer they got. He thought the best time he'd ever had with Hallie, outside of when he was alone with her, was that time when Wick was in town on a three-day pass, that time right after Jim had asked her to marry him.

"If we're engaged," she had said, "we have to celebrate. Champagne and stuff. A nice big secret celebration."

He had told her about Wick. "I don't know," he said. "He isn't exactly—I mean, you've got to understand him. He's sort of a hillbilly. Anyway, he acts like one. I don't know if you'd know the kind of girl—"

"Stop worrying, lamb," she said, and then put her fingers to her mouth. "Oops! I mustn't call you that, must I? Anyhow, stop worrying. I know every kind of girl. I know everybody. I'm a valuable person to have around."

"You don't have to tell me that, darling."

He didn't like her calling him "lamb," and she didn't want him to call her "honey." She said honey sounded like somebody in a dirty wrapper making coffee for a guy on the night shift. He didn't think much of darling. Her friends used that for each other instead of names. There was a man she knew, not a fancy fellow, who even called other guys darling. It sort of made you want to throw up. But if she liked it, it was okay with him.

"I'll get Gloria Mahon," she said. "We'll really give your Wick a time."

She couldn't have done better if she had known Wick all her life. Gloria Mahon was an actress who had to model to make a living. She had modeled for some of the agency's ads, and that was how Hallie knew her. When she was modeling, she was depressed, Hallie said, but when she had an acting job she was "wonderfully manic." The night she went out with them, she was in a try-out of a new writer's play in some old theater in Greenwich Village.

"Wait till you see me on Broadway," she kept saying. "I'm absolutely bawdy!"

Flet's hair was redder than Wick's and she had dead white skin and a beautiful figure. One minute she talked Bryn Mawr English, and the next she was telling dirty jokes in raucous Brooklynese. Wick was fascinated. He did a kind of combination Virginia reel and jitterbug with her on the dance floor of the Persian Room and showed her how to drink a whole glass of beer at one time. Everybody everywhere stared at them, and they both loved it.

"I been to New York lots of times," he told her, "but this is the first time I ever really seen it."

"Wait a while, Hub," she rasped. "You ain't seen nothin'."

"What a beautiful pair of complexes," Hallie whispered to Jim. "Complexes?"

"Sure. They're both rejecting their backgrounds for some reason, Gloria, her Boston family and Wick, his college education. I know they'd love each other."

Jim didn't think Wick was rejecting anything. College just hadn't rubbed off on him much. He had cut even more classes than Jim had, and spent most of his time drinking beer and playing hot jazz records on an old phonograph you had to crank to hear. When he had to take a quiz, he could read through the material once and remember enough to get by, and forget it just as fast. He didn't, he said, want to clutter up his mind. Still, he knew a lot about a lot of things.

They went to a place on Third Avenue where steaks were served burnt black on the outside and barely done inside. An orchestra played at one end of the long, narrow room, quietly, as if practicing, or playing for its own enjoyment. Once, when Jim looked up, Gloria and Wick were at the piano, doing a complicated, polished version of "Chopsticks," accompanied by the woodwinds and the strings.

"I didn't think anybody else was as crazy as Wick," Jim said to Hallie. "He has a girl named Helen, a nice, sensible girl. I don't know. I have an idea she wouldn't mind Gloria, not for a three-day pass."

Hallie took his hand under the table. "You love Wick, don't you?"

Oh, sure, he thought. Hello, Wick. How are you darling? Jeez! "I love you," he said. "I wish we could tell them about us. It would be even more fun."

"We can't take a chance Gloria gets around too much. If your father heard now, it would spoil everything."

That's right. He spoils everything, the son of a bitch.

"But I'll work on him," Hallie said. "You'll see. I'll be the girl every man wants his son to marry. I'll be transformed by love. I'll be demure. You won't recognize me." She held his hand close to her. He could feel her thigh against his knuckles. "You've got to work on him a little too, darling."

He didn't answer her. It was too good an evening. He ordered another bottle of champagne, and Wick and Gloria came back to the table to drink it, and they sang, "D-A-R-T-M-O-U-T-H . . . fairest of colleges . . ."

"Jim, you ol' bastard," Wick said happily, "I knew I could count on you. This is the best damn time I ever had in my livin' life."

Jim wasn't sure Helen would have liked that. He didn't know why he kept thinking about Helen. It was too good an evening to think about anything. Wick wasn't married to Helen, any more than he had been married to Libby.

A poffy, he thought. Nat Tillson could really see things some

times. There was a picture in the family album of Jim's father in a kind of dress with a wide belt, sitting in a wicker pony cart. The pony had slender little legs and big eyes with a mane of hair falling across them and a look of wanting to run off and only standing there out of politeness.

He'd have to start dealing with some other garage now. It didn't matter. He knew all about cars, so nobody could put anything over on him. If they tried, he'd go somewhere else, until he found the right place. Nat Tillson wasn't the only honest guy in town who knew his business. To hell with Tillson.

As he drove up to the house, he saw Ann coming down the walk with some fellow he had never seen before. For a minute, he hardly knew Ann. The kid really didn't look bad, older, really, sort of smooth.

"Hello, Jim," she said, in a phony voice as though he had broken a leg or something and she was sorry. "I'd like you to meet Gerry Weber."

Weber stuck out his hand and said, "I am very glad to meet you."

He was a foreigner, and much older than Ann, older even than Jim. Too old for Ann, that was for sure. She was only a kid. Where had she got hold of him, anyway? Jim shook his hand.

"Where's mom?" he asked Ann.

"Upstairs. They've been wondering where you were."

She and Weber got into a '47 Pontiac that looked as if it had been kept up. If he was a guy who kept up his car, that was something in his favor. It sounded all right as they drove off, too.

Jim went into the house. His father was sitting in the dining room with the paper, his back to the door. Jim pretended not to see him. He went upstairs and knocked on his mother's door.

She was sitting on the chaise with a book. She put it down when he came in and said, "Hi. I was beginning to worry. I'm not supposed to say that, am I?"

"Nope." He grinned and sat down next to her feet. "Told you

I wouldn't be home until sooner or later. The trouble with mothers is they always expect you sooner."

"The trouble with mothers is," she said, "by the time they get used to one phase in their children, that one's finished and they've got to start all over again with the next."

"Like Ann," he said quickly. "I saw her outside. All of a sudden she looks like a dame. Who's the guy?"

"Gerhardt? He's an Austrian, here permanently now. Ann met him at camp. I think he's very attractive."

"He's too old for her. He must be twenty-five. What's happened to Bill, anyway?" He lit a cigarette for her and for himself. "Bill's a lot more her speed."

She said, "I've never known you to be so brotherly before. It's nice. But I'm not worried about Ann." She took a long drag of the cigarette. "It's you I'm worried about."

"Jeez! What now? 'Me?'" he said. "What did I do?"

"I've been sitting here thinking how to approach it. Rehearsing. That's pretty pathetic, when you think of it. I'm sure my parents never rehearsed what they wanted to say to me."

"So?"

"Libby was here."

He tried not to move. "She was? What did she want?"

"You," his mother said. "But she's afraid she isn't going to get you. She says you're engaged to someone else."

He had been sure when his mother started that this was what was coming, and yet he wasn't prepared for it. Rage began to fill him, spreading all through his chest. There had been a time, not long ago, when hardly anything made him really angry, but that time was gone.

"She had no right to tell you that. I told it to her in confidence. She knew I didn't want anybody to know it yet."

His mother smiled a little. "I don't think you should blame her, Jim. She loves you. You can't expect a girl who loves you to sit around waiting for you to marry someone else just because she wants to keep it a secret."

"I thought you didn't like Libby."

"I never said that, did I?"

They were talking all around the thing, and he knew it was no use, because in the end they would have to get down to it.

"You didn't have to say it. We could tell. And now, all of a sudden, you and she are on the same side."

She rubbed her cigarette out slowly in the ash tray, her face turned away from him. He did not feel as if he were talking to his mother. She was just somebody he was arguing with, angry at, and he did not know why, because it wasn't she who had done anything.

"I don't care anything about Libby," she said. "It's true I didn't like her once and thought she was scheming, and I don't any more, but she isn't important. If you've found someone else you can be happy with, that's all I'm interested in."

"Well, okay. Then what's this all about?"

"Don't shout, Jim. Why are you shouting? Even you can't feel it's prying if I want to know something about the girl you expect to marry. I've never heard of her. I don't even know her name." She sounded as if she might cry. He couldn't remember ever seeing her cry. He couldn't imagine what it would be like. But she did not cry. "I'm worried because you've made such a secret of it. Why should it be a secret?"

Once he had thought of his mother and father as parents, a United Front, their separateness of no particular concern to him except in small ways. His father could throw a ball better and did not ask so many questions and was easier to get around than his mother, although he seemed tougher, because he listened to facts but his mother had to be charmed, and he could not always charm her. In anything important, though, they were a United Front. He knew now that it was not so, but as he tried to think how he was going to answer his mother he couldn't help still feeling that it was.

"I would have told you," he said finally. "I wouldn't have kept it a secret from you. If I had thought you wouldn't say anything, I'd have told you right away."

"You don't want your father to know, do you?" When he

didn't answer, she said, "What's the matter between you two, Jim? You were always so close. What's happened?"

"Nothing's happened. Nothing at all." He had to get her off that tack. "It's just that this isn't the kind of girl he'd understand."

"Parents often don't understand the people their children marry. Mine certainly didn't understand Tony. He was the son of a rich New York jeweler and they were small-town people without much money and no sophistication. But I didn't keep him away from them. I didn't make a secret of him." She looked at him, and now he knew it was his mother he was talking to. "Maybe you're afraid what we think of her will confirm some doubt in your own mind."

She thought he was still kid enough to be tricked that way. But it was no use anyway. She would tell his father what Libby had said and his father would know who the girl was. The only chance would be if he could keep her from telling him.

"You'd understand her," he said. "You'd like her. I wish I could talk to you about her, about the whole thing."

She looked at him and then she looked out the window. He was sorry he had said that. When she spoke, he felt relieved, though there wasn't any reason why he should.

"I wish you could, Jim," she said. "Your father and I always want to help you. You must know that."

He got up and walked across the room. He was going to sit down on one of the beds, but the taffeta covers were on, and nobody was supposed to sit on them. The covers were dark pink, rose, he supposed they called it. He had never noticed that before. Rose, with little ruffles. It was a hell of a room for a man to sleep in.

"She's a girl at the office," he said in a loud voice. "Hallie Freed."

He heard his mother move on the chaise. "Then dad knows her."

"Yes. That's just it." He went back and sat next to her again. He could see she was trying to be very casual, but she couldn't

make it. If there was one thing his mother was not, it was casual. "Hallie's a little older than I am and she's a hell of a clever, talented girl, so dad can't understand what she sees in me. He thinks there must be something more to it, that she must be after something. I don't know what."

"That's foolish. You're an attractive boy. Any girl—" She broke off and laughed. "Maybe I'm a little prejudiced. Let me talk to dad, if you won't. He usually makes sense. Let's get it all out in the open."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"Don't be silly, Jim. What do you want to do, clope? Spring it on him? He'd take that pretty hard. It wouldn't be pleasant for anybody."

"I'd chance it. Hallie won't do it, though."

"Good for her. She must be all right. Don't worry, everything will work out." She reached up and kissed him. "You don't smell like stale birds' nests any more. I wish you still did."

"He went to the door and then turned around. 'When are you going to talk to him?'"

"I don't know. Probably tonight. You're not mad, are you?"

"No, I guess not."

He went into his own room because he did not want to go back downstairs again, past where his father was sitting, but when he got in there he didn't know what to do. He didn't want to lie down on the neatly made, unslept-in bed, and there was nothing on the desk that interested him. It wasn't really his room any more, the way it had been before he went to college. There weren't any pennants on the walls, and on the desk no school books full of homework, none of the things he used to fool around with when he was supposed to be studying—the model planes or the chemistry set or the scrap book of pictures of cars. Everything looked neat and unused now. It was like a hotel room where he kept his clothes for a few months every year until he went back to the room he really lived in, up in New Hampshire with Wick.

Only Wick wouldn't be there any more; and he probably

wouldn't be either. Nothing stayed the same. He would probably be in still another room somewhere with Hallie. He was damned, though, if it was going to have any rose taffeta ruffled bedspreads.

He sat down at the desk and opened the bottom drawer. The scrapbook of cars was still there. Pasted on the last page was a magazine ad of a 1947 Studebaker, the first model that had been designed with a chassis like a bomber. Next to it was a crude drawing of a car with similar lines, and pencilled under it the caption, "Designed by James Halliday. December 28, 1945."

Not bad for a fourteen year old kid, he thought, beating the Studebaker people to it. James Halliday, famous designer of cars, presents his new 1953 model, the Junmy H.

He slammed the book shut and dropped it in the waste basket. He wasn't fourteen any more. He was almost twenty-one. Almost twenty-one almost married almost in the army. James Almost Halliday.

For some reason he thought of the only time he had ever gone up in a ferris wheel. He had been about eight, but he would never forget it. Some kid's mother had taken a bunch of them to Playland for the kid's birthday. They all wanted to go on the ferris wheel, so he had to go too. He was afraid of heights and he got dizzy very easily, but he had to go if all the others were going. He sat in one of those little seats, and when it got all the way to the top, the wheel stopped and he sat there with the seat swaying in space. What frightened him was not the height or the feeling that he might fall, but the idea of being there alone, with nowhere all around him, of staying there and never belonging any place again. He wanted to yell for his mother, but he couldn't; he was eight years old. Anyway, he knew she was too far away to hear him. He just sat there until the wheel began to move again and took him down. Then he went politely behind a bush and threw up.

He heard his father come upstairs now, looking for his mother. He heard the hum of their voices. Maybe she was telling him, she was waiting for tonight. But in a minute his mother knocked

lightly on the door, as if afraid he might be asleep, and spoke from the hall:

"Jim? We're going to have some sandwiches. Do you want something?"

"No, mom, thanks. I'm not hungry."

He got into his dungarees, and as soon as they were in the kitchen he went outside and began cleaning his car. He didn't know what he was going to do when he was finished. He didn't know what to do with himself. Sunday was a hell of a day. He'd have liked to go to the beach, but Libby might be there. He should have stayed in New York, there was always something to do in New York, but he had felt he ought to come home. He didn't know why, an engaged guy; he certainly didn't have to report home like a little kid, and all he'd got for it was trouble.

Hallie was going to be sore as hell when she heard his father knew. He had promised her he wouldn't say anything until she gave the word.

"I'll be able to tell when the time is ripe," she had said. "When I'm sure he'll open his arm, and say, 'Yes, my darling daughter, I'll let you know.'"

"What if he never says it?"

"He will. I'm an awfully smart little girl."

Well, he couldn't help it. He had had to tell Libby. He had owed her that. He couldn't help if it she had gone and spilled it to his mother. If Hallie was sore, she'd have to get over it. She was making it too important anyway, this thing of staying on the right side of his father. Who the hell cared?

When he had finished cleaning the car, he was so hot that he had to go to the beach. He couldn't keep staying away from places where Libby might be. After all, she might be anywhere. He might meet her any time. Years from now, when he was married to Hallie, he might bump into her at the station. She would ask him where he was going, and whether she could give him a lift, and he would thank her and tell her gently that Hallie was waiting for him in the car.

"Mom, I'm going down for a swim," he yelled. "I'll be back for dinner."

Of course he and Hallie would not be living anywhere around here, he thought, as he drove toward the beach. Hallie would never live any place but New York. She thought the suburbs were terrible.

"Have you ever seen the bars around Grand Central and Penn Station at five o'clock?" she said. "They're swarming with desperate commuters, tanking up so they'll have the courage to take the 5:28 back to their vegetable wives and their mortgaged houses and their bad-mannered kids."

She said that of course a woman could be a vegetable in New York too, but that at least if you started out with ambition and curiosity and vitality, there was something to keep it going; it wouldn't all die for lack of nourishment the way it did in the suburbs.

"Heaven keep me," she said, 'from ever having no one better to outwit than a Japanese beetle!"

He tried to imagine being married to Hallie and living in New York, but it was the same every time he thought about it. All he could see was the two of them in bed. He could never get past that. Maybe he didn't want so. Maybe a man never wanted to. Hallie always said marriage was invented by women.

He drove around the beach parking lot twice before he found a spot for his car. When he got out on the sand he saw a lot of kids he knew, but he didn't feel like talking to them. He waved, and pretended he was going to meet somebody at the other end of the beach.

What would he have to talk about to them? Most of them were kids who had graduated from high school with him and were home from college the way he was, but he had nothing else in common with them any more. They were shrieking and throwing sand at each other and chasing each other into the water the way they had done since they were freshmen in high school. They weren't thinking about getting married.

He spread his towel out on the sand and lay back on it. All

he could see was the sky. The terrible loneliness of that time on the ferris wheel came back to him again. He had only to sit up to see that there were other people near him. He had only to move a little to be among them. But it would not have done any good.

Now that he was here, he didn't know why he had come. He had never liked being alone, doing nothing, and the drive had cooled him off so that he had no particular desire for a swim any more. He could go home and get dressed and drive to New York. There would be something doing at Hallie's, or if not she would know where there was something doing. But he wouldn't go. He had told his mother he would be home for dinner.

"Hello, Jim."

He was not startled, even though he had not heard her coming across the sand in her bare feet. He sat up and there she was, in two scraps of yellow bathing suit, looking at him with her mouth open a little and the hair falling across her forehead.

"The kids told me you were here," she said. "I thought I'd come over a minute and say hello."

"I didn't see you with the others."

"I guess I was in the water. Have you been in the water?"

"Not yet."

"It's a little cold, but after you get in it's wonderful."

She was standing there and he was still sitting down. "Why don't you sit here a minute?" He was embarrassed. He knew she was too. "I haven't seen you for a long time."

It was a dumb thing to say. She could have come right back at him on that one. But she sat down and began playing with the sand, letting it run through her fingers and watching it as if she had never seen sand before.

"I saw your mother this morning," she said.

"Yes, she told me."

"Did she tell you—? I mean, do you know what we talked about?"

He wasn't ready for this yet. He hadn't expected her to bring it up. You'd think she would have wanted to avoid it, if he

didn't mention it. But he remembered that she had never liked waiting for anything, even something unpleasant. She always had to get things over with.

"I know what you talked about," he said.

She watched the sand pouring out between her fingers. "Are you mad?"

He thought of the rage he had felt when he first heard what she had done. But it was all gone now. It had lasted, he realized, only a minute.

"I guess not," he said. "Maybe it's just as well. They had to find out sooner or later."

"Are they going to try to stop you?"

What a question, he thought. What a question for her to ask him. He could just imagine Hallie asking anything that naive. He felt sorry for her because she didn't know any better than to give herself away like that, and he wished he could think of something comforting to say to her.

"My father probably will," he said.

It was a while before she spoke. She stopped running the sand through her hands and began trying to build something with it, a castle or something, but the sand was too soft and dry and it all just fell into a mound without any shape.

"I shouldn't have told you not to go into your father's office," she said then. "I didn't know it would make you so mad. It wasn't really any of my business."

"That was all right. That didn't have anything to do with anything."

He was not sure now whether it had or not, but what difference did it make? He had to say something.

"It was only that I was afraid if you went into something you didn't care about," she said, "you might be unhappy later and start to hate me because you wouldn't have done it except for me. But I guess I had nothing to do with it."

He didn't know what to say to that.

"That time you called up about a date for Wick," she said, "I was still awfully mad and hurt, but I wish now I had gone with

you." When he still did not say anything she asked: "Did you get a date for him all right?"

"What?"

"For Wick. Did you get him a date that night?"

"Oh. Oh yes, I got him a date."

"How is Wick?"

"Fine," he said. "He's fine. You know Wick."

"Yes." She laughed, and he realized it was the first time she had laughed or even smiled. "Wick's wonderful. There's nobody like him."

Jim rolled over on his stomach and began to try to help her make a sand castle. "A friend of mine thinks he's got a complex. You know, the way he talks and everything. This friend says he's got some reason for rejecting his education."

"That sounds silly to me. Wick's so open and natural. I can't believe he has any complex. Of course I don't know much about it. I never studied psychology."

"Well, I did, but I still don't know much about it." He laughed. "It's surprising how little you can learn in college if you really try."

He had had fun, though. Now that he thought about it, he had had more fun in college than any other time in his life. Well, that was what his father had wanted, hadn't he? "You'll never have four years like this," he had said. "Get all you can out of it. There's much more there than what's in the books. Enjoy it all." He had enjoyed it. He couldn't help it; he couldn't make Phi Beta with his left hand. Everybody couldn't be that smart.

"I wish I had seen Wick," Libby said, but she seemed to be thinking of something else. She had stopped playing with the sand and turned her head so Jim could not see her face. After a minute she said, "Jim?"

"Yeah?"

"Jim, that girl, the one you're—" He could hardly hear her and he leaned closer and then wished he hadn't. "Jim, do you stay with her? Like last night, I mean." His voice got stronger.

and then faded out again. "Were you with her in New York last night—I mean, all night?"

He edged away from her, trying not to make it look noticeable. He felt as if he couldn't breathe. "For Chrissake!" he said.

"Well," she asked softly, "were you?"

"For Chrissake, Libby, that's a hell of a question. Who ever heard of a girl asking a question like that?"

"That means yes," she said. She sat up, pulling her knees up under her and hugging them with her arms. He was afraid she was going to look at him, but she kept her eyes on the ocean. "Jim," she said, and stopped. "Jim, would it have been better—between us, I mean—if I had—?"

"Shut up, Libby. Will you please shut up?"

"I would have, if I'd have thought it would be better."

He got to his feet, the sand spraying from his body. "I'm going in for a swim," he said. "You go back to the kids. You go back. Please—" He had to clear his throat and say it again. "Please don't be here when I come out."

"All right," she said. "I'm sorry, Jim."

What was he trying to do, keep him dangling? Did he think he was punishing him, or something? All the way in on the train. Jim had waited for him to say something, even if it was only that he wanted to see him in his office when they got in, but he hadn't said a damn thing. He had read the paper the way he always did, giving half of it to Jim, and made a couple of comments on the news and on the advertising and talked to a man he knew across the aisle.

When they got out of the elevator at the office, his father said, "I told Stillman to show you how to make a layout, if he gets a chance today. I thought you might like that. You used to do a little sketching, didn't you?"

What was he trying to do, show what a fine, generous, understanding guy he was before he began slapping him down?

"Just cars," Jim said.

"Well, that's all right."

The morning went by without any word from either Stillman or his father. Jim made a file of the man-with-the-sling campaign. The poor bastard's arm was still out of commission after all these weeks. Esquire had run a cartoon in which he came without his sling to visit a girl in black underwear and she asked him how he dared call on a lady when he wasn't properly dressed. It was funny the way an idea like that could catch on. It didn't amount to anything, as far as Jim could see, but it had made Culverston whisky sales jump, and it hadn't hurt the Halliday Advertising Agency a bit. Anybody ought to be able to think up an idea as good as that.

At lunch time, his father sent in word that he was tied up and that Jim should go ahead. They hardly ever had lunch together, because his father usually spent that time with clients, but Jim was always supposed to wait for a message.

He walked up to Whitney's. For a while he had tried eating at the places with counters and booths, fancy-named to fit the neighborhood, Hot Dog Heaven and Hamburger Paradise and Bacon and Egg Bistro, but after standing for almost half an hour one day to get a stool to sit on with the next customer breathing down his back, he returned to Whitney's. No matter how crowded it was, Max always got him a table in a few minutes, and he could sit there as long as he liked. In the beginning he had thought that people were looking at him, but nobody looked at anybody in Whitney's. They were all too busy making big publishing and advertising deals over the martinis and the devilled crabs.

Jim was eating his dessert when he saw Hallie come in with a man. They sat at a table not far from him, Hallie with her back to him. He tried to remember whether she had ever seen the man before, maybe at one of her parties. He was pretty sure he hadn't. It must be business, he decided, or it could even be a relative. He didn't look like a relative, though, and she wasn't really at the stage yet where she went out for business lunches. But it had to be something like that. She knew Jim ate at Whit-

ney's all the time, and she wouldn't pick this place to come with some other guy if it wasn't all okay.

The thing to do was to go over there and say hello, but he didn't go. Instead, he sat and watched them. This man with her was no young guy, but he acted as if he were. He kept smiling and showing his teeth and looking hearty. Something about him reminded Jim of Lex, or of the way he thought Lex must have been ten years ago. They each drank two martinis and then they ordered, but when the food came they only picked at it. Most of the customers at Whitney's only picked at the food, though the good food was one reason they went there. They were too busy talking to eat.

Jim wished he could hear what those two were talking about, but Whitney's was sound proofed and you could hear only the people right nearby. He didn't know why he sat there watching them, what he was looking for. All he could see was the back of Hallie's head and the guy leaning toward her and showing his teeth. He could have been telling her about AAA ratings or asking for the key to her apartment.

When he couldn't stand it any more, he got up and went over. Hallie looked at him without any particular surprise and introduced him. The guy's name was Mullins or Miller or something. He said:

"Not *the* Mr. Halliday?" and flashed the teeth to show he knew better.

"This is Jim," Hallie said. "The son."

"And here, of course," Mullins or Miller said. What a stupid ass, Jim thought. Hallie couldn't go for such a damn fool.

"What do you do, Mr. Milkins?" Jim asked him.

"Miller," Hallie said. "M-I-L-L-A-R. Reddington and Miller. You know, Jim."

He would not have known two months ago, but he knew now. Reddington and Miller was the agency that handled the United Tobacco account, one of the biggest accounts in advertising. Lita gar cigarettes, Earl of Chichester pipe tobacco. The man in the Inverness cap on television, lighting his cigarette in a fog.

saying with a British accent, "But it's clear there's no smoke like Trafalgar."

"Have you had your lunch?" Millar asked. "Will you join us?"

Before Jim could answer, Hallie said, "He can't. He has to get back to the office." She gave him a look he didn't understand, a kind of sad look. "I'll see you later, Jim."

He would have been angry, but the look stopped him. All the way back to the office he tried to figure out what it had meant, what was going on. That guy Millar, whom he had thought was an ass, was a long way from it. The Boy Wonder of Advertising, they called him. At thirty-five, if you had the United Tobacco account, you were not only a Wonder but a Boy. That was Hallie's kind, a guy like that.

He stopped at the switchboard and asked the receptionist whether there was any message from his father. She said that there was not, that Mr. Halliday had been tied up for the past hour with a Mr. Nye.

•The F.B.I. man. He had been here at the office once before, and up at the house three or four times. You would have thought Lex was trying out for at least Secretary of State. Nye had had a couple of long sessions with other members of the family behind closed doors, but he had questioned Jim for only a few minutes once about whether he knew Mrs. Dellett, and whether he had ever bumped into her older son, who had graduated from Dartmouth a year ago. Jim had told him he had seen Mrs. Dellett. He had never heard of her son. What the Dellett woman had to do with Lex, Jim could not imagine. Nye had the wrong guy, he thought.

He went back to passing up the scrap book and waiting. When the phone on the desk finally rang, it was not his father but Hallie. She asked him if he would come in to her office a minute. For the first time, she did not bother to say, in case anyone was listening in, that she had some work for him. That was okay with Jim. It would all be out in a little while anyhow, as soon as his father got around to it.

She was sitting at her desk with everything neatly arranged

in front of her, the way it always was. He started over to her, but she looked up at him without smiling and he sat down instead.

"What's up?" he asked. When she did not answer right away, he said, "That guy, Millar. What were you doing there with him?"

"Discussing a job," she said.

"What?"

"A job. He asked me once if I'd like to work for him. I was reminding him of it."

Jim thought a minute. Then he got up and leaned across the desk toward her. "Sure. Why didn't we think of it before?" he said. "That's the answer. You get a job somewhere else, and you don't have to give a damn about my father. Why didn't we—?"

"Sit down," she said, and she had that look on her face he had seen in Whitney's. "Sit down, Jim."

"All right, I'm sitting down."

She began doodling with a pencil. He had never seen her do that before. One of the things he had always noticed about her was how still she kept her hands, not fussing with her hair or picking at her face like other girls he knew.

"Your father talked to me this morning," she said.

"What? What about?"

"He asked me why I wanted to marry you."

It took him a minute. First he heard the words, and then he seemed to see them, as if on a screen. "Oh," he said. "Oh, that's the way he's playing it. Not straight out to me, the way you'd expect. Sneaking around to you, trying to—"

"Jim, listen." Her voice had changed. She put down the pencil. "I told him I loved you, and he asked me if I loved you enough to marry you even if neither of us had a job here any more."

"The son of a bitch," Jim said. "He wouldn't—"

"Maybe he wouldn't. Maybe he was bluffing," she said. "I tried to outbluff him. I said I loved you enough to marry you no matter what happened. You have no idea how sweet I was. But

he didn't buy. He said I had a future in advertising, and he'd recommend me highly, giving me plenty of credit for my part in the man-with-the-sling campaign. This is if I leave, of course, and forget you. He wasn't explicit about the alternative." She smiled a little. "Corny, yes? Not much of a switch on the old routine where papa writes out a check and the heroine tears it up and throws it in his face."

He started to speak without knowing what he intended to say, but she was going on.

"Only I didn't throw it in his face. Chapter Twenty-Six, Heroine Reveals True Nature. Damn you, Jim," she said suddenly in a different voice, "don't sit there looking twelve years old. Don't you know what I'm trying to tell you?"

"No," he said. "No. Don't talk like that. Chapter Twenty-Six. Don't be so clever. Everybody's so Goddam clever. Why don't you come straight out with it?"

She nodded. "It's easier to be clever," she said, "but I'll try. When I told your father I loved you, that was true. You won't believe it now, so just file it away and take it out some other time, maybe ten years from now." She looked at him and then turned so she was facing the window. "I told you once I could go far in this business if I got the breaks. When I met you, I thought you were one of the breaks. When you wanted to marry me, I thought if it could be played right, this might be the jackpot, not only the business but a boy. I was crazy about too. Well, it wasn't played right."

He stood up. "If you loved me—"

"I know," she broke in. "I know what you think. But it isn't always like that. There isn't a standard test for it, the way they tell you. You can't say I don't love you at all because I don't love you enough." She put out her hand and he thought she was going to touch him, but then she let it fall back on the desk. "That's all. We could keep on talking about it, but it wouldn't do any good. That's all there is, lamb."

He felt as if he had been running too fast. "You're a bitch,"

he said, but he had only enough breath to sound the last word.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I suppose so."

He stood there a minute, trying to think of something else to say. Once in Junior High School he had seen the tip of a boy's finger cut off by a power saw. The boy had yelled once and then stared at his bloody finger and at the saw, wondering what to do next. In one second it had happened and was over, and the boy had been unable to believe that was all there was to it.

"You'll be sorry," Jim said. "You'll be Goddam sorry."

He yanked the door open, but it closed slowly and softly behind him. In the corridor he looked up and down, trying to think where to go. The only place he could think of was the Men's Room, and even there somebody might come in and talk. When he was a kid, he had never liked playing hide-and-seek. He had never liked being "It," with everybody running away and leaving him, or one of the hiders, crouching somewhere alone. He had always been afraid of being alone, and now he didn't know how or where.

Stillman came along as he stood there. "Oh, Jim," he said, "I was looking for you. They wanted me to show you something about layouts."

"I can't now. I have--I can't."

"Oh, come along," Stillman said pettishly. "I'll tell whoever else you're doing anything for that this has first priority." He glanced at Hallie's door. "Who is it, Miss Breed?"

"No," Jim said. "No, that's okay. Let's go."

He followed Stillman into his office and watched while the old man pinned paper to his drawing board, and he listened to the fussy, explaining voice, but he neither saw nor heard. The numbness was leaving him and his blood felt hot, as after frost bite. Lamb, he thought, Silly Goddam lamb. And his father had known it all along and knew it now and was waiting to rub it in, the son of a bitch.

"There's as much satisfaction in it," Stillman was saying. "Really as much."

"What?"

"In craftsmanship. Haven't you been listening?" Stillman stepped away from his drawing-board and squinted at his sketch. "Craftsmanship. I wasted half my life despairing because I lacked the spark to be a great artist. Who's to say the craftsman is anything less? In my way I'm a great craftsman, a great technician. I never should have felt I was wasting my talents. Isn't that a beautiful layout?"

He waited for Jim to answer and Jim said that it certainly was. "All right, then. Why isn't it as admirable an accomplishment as a painting that hangs in the Metropolitan?"

Jim said that he didn't know why it wasn't.

"The answer is that of course it is as admirable. Each is beautiful in its own way, each the superior work of a particular kind of talent, one Craftsmanship, one Art, yet each partaking of both. Correct?"

"Yes," Jim said, "I think you have a point there."

He didn't know what the old guy was talking about. It sounded the same to him as some of the talk at those parties, like gobble-dygook. Hell, maybe it was, maybe it was all gobble-dygook, and he could have sounded as clever as any of them.

"Here," Stillman said, handing him a pencil, "try it yourself now. Anything you want. Just try to remember what I've told you."

Jim took the pencil and began to sketch, not with broad, light strokes like Stillman, but digging the pencil into the paper. He drew the outline of a car, with a figure crumpled under the front wheels. The figure could have been a man. It could have been a girl.

"Where's your copy going?" Stillman asked irritably. "Where's your head? How do I know what it is?" He peered at the sketch again. "An institutional job, I suppose. Automobile insurance? Well, don't make it that gruesome, with the victim right under the wheels. If it's too gruesome, nobody will look at it. Just show an outstretched hand, or a child's legs with a doll or a teddy bear next to them. Pity is what you're trying to get, pity and fear, not horror." He was revising Jim's sketch as

he talked. "See what I mean? Now you have something beautiful."

Jim looked at the layout. Under the rough drawing, Stillman had blocked in the words: If YOU Were the Driver of this Car . . . What was so tough about that? Jim thought. You drew a lousy picture, and it turned into an ad for automobile insurance.

"That's great, Mr. Stillman," he said. "I don't know how you do it."

Stillman cleared his throat. "Well," he said. "Well, I've been at it a long time. Would you like to try another one?"

"I'd love to, Mr. Stillman, but I can't right now. I have to see my father about something."

He went out before Stillman could say anything. He wasn't going to wait until the son of a bitch got good and ready to rub it in. He wasn't going to sit around and wait.

"Is my father still busy with Mr. Nye?" he asked the receptionist.

She said that Mr. Nye had left some time ago. She smiled at him as she said it, and it looked like more than an office smile. That's right, he thought. Play up to the silly Goddard lamb and you may end up owning the business.

His father's desk chair was rolled over to the window and he was sitting there looking out. He swivelled around when he heard Jim's step.

"Hello, Jim," he said. "I was expecting you." He sounded like a character in a whodunit. "Sit down."

"In the contour chair?" Jim asked pleasantly.

His father blinked. "Wherever you damn please."

"I guess I'll stand. I won't be here long. I'd just like to know why you didn't tell me what you had in mind, why you had to go sneaking behind my back—" This wasn't what he had meant to say. His voice was shaking and he sounded childish. He hadn't meant to sound childish. It was in his mind one way, but it came out another. "That's all I'd like to know," he said.

"All right," his father said. "All right, Jim. I'll try to overlook

anything you say. You've been kicked in the teeth. I know how you feel."

He could be nice now, nice and understanding. He had showed what a clever guy he was and what a fool Jim was and so he could be nice. He knew how Jim felt. The hell he did. How did anybody know how anybody else felt?

"Please skip the sympathy," he said. "Please just answer my question."

"All right. What was your question? Why didn't I tell you what I was going to do? Because it would have done no good. I tried to talk to you about Hallie once. This time I thought I'd better act on my own, before it was too late." He looked at Jim, and it was the way everybody was always looking at him, lately, as if he had broken a leg. "Does that answer you?"

"You're pretty clever," Jim said. "I'm not as clever as you are."

"What does that mean?"

He didn't know what it meant. Everything he wanted to say seemed to be dissolving. "You didn't have to stage it like this. I'd have found out about her."

"Maybe. I wasn't willing to take the chance. You're my son."

"Hearts and flowers."

"All right, Jim. All right. Let's leave it that I had to interfere, because something like this happened to me once and I think enough of you not to want it to happen to you."

Jim raised his eyebrows. "You mean you weren't always so clever?"

"It's easy to be clever when someone else is involved. When a girl attracts you, of course you want to believe she's in love with you. It doesn't take much to convince you. As a matter of fact," he said, "I think Hallie cues for you in her way."

"We were talking about you."

"Yes. I think my girl cared for me too, but she also cared more for other things. That's why I recognized Hallie. You could have married her and maybe even made out all right, but I didn't think it was good enough for you. I want you to have something as good as I've had."

Jim's hands were cold. He held them together behind his back. "You mean a wife who goes all out for you and a girl on the side too? You mean as good as that?"

His father looked out of focus, as if he had moved away to the end of the room. But he was still sitting at the window. Nothing had changed.

"I'm trying to keep my temper, Jim. I'm trying to be patient. You'd better explain that."

"Darling," Jim said. "How do you like necking under the back steps, darling?"

"What?"

"Nancy, darling."

His father got white. It took him a while to speak. "Who has been talking to you, Jim?"

"Ann."

"Ann? Ann who?"

"Your daughter, Ann. She saw you, the two of you. She heard you call her darling."

"My God." His father sat there a minute. "That was years ago, five years, six. Why now? Why does it come out now?"

"Does that make any difference?"

His father did not seem to be listening. He was frowning down at his knees. "Nye," he said. "Nye and his damn questions. All right." He looked at Jim. "All right, I got tight at a party and kissed Nancy Delett. It's too bad Ann had to see it. A kid like that wouldn't understand. But you're a man, Jim. You know these things happen."

"Darling?"

"All right. You know how that is. You get carried away."

He wished his father would not keep saying all right, because it wasn't. Nothing was all right. Here he was and there was his father, sitting there explaining to him, the way he himself had often sat explaining to his father. It made him feel sick. The anger was going now and the sickness taking its place.

"No," he said. "You were sleeping with her."

His father did not move for a minute. Then he rolled his

chair back behind the desk and folded his arms across the top. "All right," he said. "I don't think you know that. I don't think you could know it. But if I deny it, you won't believe me anyway. Maybe, instead, I can make you understand."

"Sure. You'll make with a lot of clever words. When you're all through you'll still be a—"

"Let's leave out the name-calling. That won't get us anywhere. And don't be so damn self-righteous. How do you know what follies you'll commit in the next twenty-five years? You're off to a pretty good start already, making a damn fool of yourself over a girl who—I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that." He sighed. "Sit down, Jim. Let's start over."

Jim sat in one of the straight chairs. His legs were too tired to stand any more.

"I'd like to ask you something first," his father said. "Is this what's been bothering you these past weeks? Why didn't you come out with it long ago?" When Jim did not answer, he said, "I suggest that you're using this as an excuse for an antagonism you had no valid reason to express before—an antagonism that has nothing to do with this at all."

"Antagonism, hell," Jim said. "I always thought you were a great guy."

His father blinked the way he had before, and looked for a pencil. He picked one up and began jabbing at his memo pad. "It's possible to feel that, and at the same time to feel resentment. You know. You studied psychology."

"Studied isn't the right word. I passed an exam. I haven't got your head for that kind of stuff."

His father looked at him and smiled a little. "See? That's what I mean."

How did they get here? Jim thought. How did they get around to this? An hour ago Hallie had told him he was all washed up, and here he was listening to his father talk about antagonism. He felt as if he had taken a wrong turn in one of those mazes at Playland, and now he would never get out.

"Everybody's so God-dam clever," he said. Had he just said

that? "Everybody's a psychologist. All I know is, you talk about what a great marriage you've got, and all the time you've been sleeping around. Do I have to have some other reason for—?"

"Shut up, Jim, and listen. I haven't been 'sleeping around,' as you put it. This was one incident, six years ago, that lasted for three or four months. I wish it hadn't happened, but it did, and all I can do is try to make you see why."

Everything was turned around, and now Jim could never again explain why he had spent so much money, or why his marks were not better, because they would both think of this.

"You don't have to," he said. "Skip it."

For the first time, his father looked angry. "It's too late for that now. Shut up and listen." He sighed again. "I mentioned before that I'd had an experience like yours with Hallie. Well, the girl was Nancy Dellett. I was engaged to her before I met your mother, and she broke it off when she had a chance to marry a man with money. I never saw her again until six years ago, when—well, when someone who knew us both told her I needed a receptionist, and she came to apply for the job. She said her son was almost grown and she was sick of doing nothing. She also said that she had learned how little happiness material things could bring. I should have thrown her out on her tail, but I didn't."

He lit a cigarette. It seemed to Jim that it was taking him a longer time than necessary. His hands fumbled in his pockets, and he struck the match three times before it lit.

"I was forty-one," he said. "I had been married seventeen years. But I was a young man. I looked young. I felt young." He started to smile at Jim, and then changed his mind. "Nothing is so reassuring to a young man of forty-one as an attractive woman. And this one had thrown me over when I was twenty-two. I wanted to show her what a mistake she had made. Besides, I felt she owed me something."

"What about mom?"

His father turned his hands palm up and then let them fall down again on the desk. "I don't know how to answer that," he

said. "But everything was the same between your mother and me and she never knew. She might have been hurt, and it doesn't seem possible to me now that I could have taken that risk, but as it turned out she wasn't." He frowned. "I haven't made much of a case for myself, have I? But it's all over now, all over a long time ago, and there was never anything else in twenty-three years." He fumbled for another cigarette. Jim fought the impulse to light it for him. "It's a funny thing, when you think of it, that I never had to account to your mother, but I'm accounting to you."

Jim stood up. "If you don't mind, I'd like to get out of here. I'd like to take the rest of the day off."

"I don't blame you. Go ahead."

He started to leave, but his father stopped him before he got to the door. "Jim—"

"Yes?"

"Do you still hate my guts?"

"I don't know. I don't know if I ever did. I don't know. I just want to get the hell out of here."

"All right," his father said. "All right, Jim."

"Missa Halliday, you got a no good grass seed. Dis grass seed, she never grow," Patsy said. "I buy grass seed, plant right away before leaves fall, you get fine good lawn next year."

Zelda kept the back screen door between herself and the dark, muscular little man. "There's nothing wrong with that grass seed," she said. "It's a good brand. I paid \$1.75 a pound for it."

"My seed better," he said. "Costs one eighty-five, but much better. Dis seed you got, she grow only crab grass and a dandelion."

It probably would, too, Zelda thought, if she insisted on his using it. He wanted to buy the same seed and make a profit on it, and if she refused to let him, he would see to it that her lawn failed to thrive. Why didn't she get rid of the blackmailing little

monster? But their first gardener had got drunk and cut the heads off all the peonies.

"If I can take back the seed I bought--"

"Nonsense," Marcia's voice said behind her. "Patsy wouldn't want to put you to all that trouble." She pushed open the door, nudging Zelda as she passed, and went down the steps to where the gardener stood. "I'll bet you can make it grow. You look to me like a man who could make anything grow anywhere."

She stood smiling down at him, splendid in her pearl trimmed black cashmere sweater and made-to-order black slacks, but he was not awed. He grinned at her, his sly monkey face full of delight. This was his idea of a woman, Zelda thought.

"Sure," he said. "I'm first-class fine gardener."

"I can tell that," Marcia said. "I'll bet you can take these very seeds and grow a lawn that will make people stop and look and ask who the Halliday's gardener is."

His grin seemed glued to his face, yet Zelda could not recall that she had ever seen him smile before. "Dat's good a idea. Like a advertise, huh?"

"Exactly. Pretty sharp of you to think of it."

He winked. "Sure I'm pretty sharp fella. Well, so long."

He moved off toward his truck, swaggering on his bandy legs, and Zelda called after him, "Aren't you going to seed the lawn now, Patsy?"

"Be back. Gotta buy fertilizer. Extra fine lawn need extra fine fertilizer."

Marcia came back into the house, laughing. "He's wonderful," she said. "I love him."

"He'll only make it up on the fertilizer."

"I know. What of it? Even meat for spaghetti sauce is a dollar a pound."

Zelda smiled. Marcia always made things and people better than they were. In a few minutes she had changed a sullen, cunning, no-good gardener into a whimsical character.

"I wish you could stay and manage him," Zelda said. "He won't do anything for me."

"Yes, he will. Try not talking to him in that special tone you use, as if he were deaf or dull witted."

"I didn't know I did."

Marcia sat down at a card table in the living room, where a half-solved jigsaw puzzle was set up, and began trying to fit pieces into spaces where they obviously would not fit. Lex had brought it to her a week ago, and she had been working on it ever since, with more enthusiasm than skill. He was always bringing her silly gifts, dime store jewelry and games and children's toys, and she wore and used them all. She had gone to a party one night with a twenty-five cent gift pin, emblazoned with red glass stones, fastened to her Mainbocher dress.

Zelda sat down and helped her with the puzzle. Immediately she was back in Framington. She and Marcia were sitting on the parlor floor playing parchesi. It was draughty, because no matter how much coal was poured into the furnace, the warmth escaped through the meandering, high ceilinged rooms. Rain—why was rain so often a part of memories?—spilled over the leaf-clogged gutters and sloshed against the windows. In another part of the house the boys, who were not allowed free run of the parlor, made the weird inhuman cries of young males at play, faintly, behind a closed door.

Although now the September sun slanted warmly through the windows, Zelda could feel the chill of the Framington house and smell the slight mustiness that clung to the thick upholstery and the heavy drapes most of the year. She could smell chicken roasting and apple pie baking. There was no exhaust fan to foster the impression that food appeared on the table without any such plebian process as cooking.

Marcia looked up, with a parchesi counter in her hand, and said, "I'm hungry."

"You're always hungry. What's the use of pestering them to let you go out with boys if you're going to get so fat no boys will like you anyhow?"

"Mama says nice boys like you for your character."

Zelda, bending over the jigsaw puzzle in her warm living

room in Westchester, laughed. "Nice boys like you for your character."

"What?" Marcia tried to fit a piece of sky into the bottom of the puzzle. "What did you say?"

"Nice boys like you for your character. Don't you remember? We were playing parchesi—"

"Parchesi? I haven't played parchesi in thirty years."

"That's when this was. Back home. I told you not to eat so much if you wanted the boys to like you, and you said mama told you nice boys like you for your character."

Marcia laughed. "It sounds like mama. I wonder if she really believed it."

"Of course she did."

"What ever made you think of it all of a sudden?"

How could you know? It was all part of you, part of what you were. If she and Marcia had not played parchesi that afternoon in Framington, if it had not been raining, if there had been roast beef instead of chicken, if they had not said what they did say, everything might have been different.

"Was it my svelte figure that reminded you?" Marcia looked down at herself. "I know I shouldn't dress like this. It's for the spirit instead of the flesh."

"You always look wonderful."

"Do I? That's good. Because I couldn't stand one of those little numbers in menopause blue."

They giggled together as if they were still little girls playing parchesi. Other relationships were always changing, the balance shifting, but she and Marcia stayed the same. In the end, everything between them went back to Framington and the Studio.

"I wonder how Lex is making out," Marcia said. She pushed away from the table and lit a cigarette. "I can see him in Washington, pacing in some outer office like an expectant father. He's been patient a long time for this job. I hope they're going to tell him something definite."

"They will. Nye's all finished. There can't be anything else to wait for."

Marcia watched the smoke sifting through a shaft from the lowering sun. "Poor Lex."

"Poor Lex? I don't think so."

"Yes. He should have been a guardsman or a knight or something. You know, something resplendent, with only a little light duelling or tourneying to take care of now and then, and all the ladies of the court to choose from."

Zelda got up and rearranged some dahlias in a bowl on the piano. It was a beautiful piano, but it was only an ornament now. Both children had taken lessons on it for brief periods, but since neither of them had shown any interest or talent, it had seemed useless to continue. Nobody could be popular any more by playing the piano, when Horowitz and Rubinstein and Erroll Garner entertained for nothing in everyone's living room.

"I'd like to see Nye's report," Zelda said. "I'd like to know what he was trying to find out all these weeks."

"I have a pretty good idea," Marcia said. "Paula Thayer called me up this morning. She just got back from Nantucket."

Zelda poked at the dahlias. There was something so gracious ladyish about arranging flowers, but she was not really very good at it. It required a kind of small-nausea patience that she had never learned.

"I can't imagine that Paula Thayer's gossip could be very instructive," she said.

"It was, though. Very instructive."

It would seem unnatural for Zelda to refrain from asking what Paula Thayer had said, but she did not want to ask it. She was not ready to discuss with Marcia now the paternity of Nancy Dellett's son. When she would be ready, what would make her ready, she did not know, but she was not ready now.

"Was that Tony's car?" She went to the window. "I'm sure I heard the car."

"I didn't hear anything."

"I'm sure I heard it." She went to another window at the side, overlooking the driveway. "Well, I don't see it, but I was sure I heard it. Good heaven, in a couple of weeks Jim will be back

at school and I'll be driving Tony to and from the station again. The old routine. It doesn't seem possible the summer's almost over."

"It's been quite a summer."

"Yes," Zelda said, "it has. It's been quite a summer." She was still at the window, watching the empty driveway. "It will be awfully quiet around here soon. Jim and Ann both away. It doesn't seem possible. Ah, here's the car now!" She moved back into the room. "Jim's at the wheel again. He always used to do the driving, but Tony's been doing it most of this summer. There's some significance in that, but I don't know what it is. Some obscure masculine byplay."

Tony and Jim came in together. She had never before been aware of the resemblance between them. Perhaps it was because they were so similarly dressed. Tony's suit was blue and Jim's oxford gray, or charcoal gray as they called it now, but they were tailored exactly alike in the unmistakable Brooks ready-to-wear-imitating made-to-measure manner. They both wore white button down shirts and different versions of ties that were loud and yet gentlemanly. Jim was better-looking, of course, and his hair was thick and curly, as Tony's had been once but was no more.

"Hello, you two," she said, and kissed them both. "Tough day, at the office?"

Tony kept his arm around her. This was something new. He had even taken to kissing her quite warmly in front of the others. It was altogether out of character, and there was no use trying to figure out what it might mean because the possibilities were too numerous.

"Not bad. Your son came up with a pretty fair layout today." He did not quite look at Jim as he said this. "Stillman's been working with him for a week or so and he thinks he has ability."

Jim smiled at Zelda. "What else would Stillman say? The boss's son always has ability. Hi, Aunt Marcia. How's the puzzle coming?"

"Lousy."

Marcia grinned up at him, and Zelda felt a wrench of jealousy. There was a relationship between them that she had never been able to achieve with Jim. She supposed no mother could, because part of it was certainly sexual, as was part of Marcia's relationship with any male, even Patsy, the gardener. But there was something else. Zelda could never have said "Lousy" to him the way Marcia did, without sounding as though she were consciously talking on his level.

"I must be dull-witted," Marcia said. "Every piece I pick up always looks like the one I'm trying to find."

Jim patted her on the head. "You're not dull-witted, auntie, just optimistic. Well. I'll go up and shower. How soon's dinner, mom?"

"Do I ever know? When Rena sees fit to bring it on. Three quarters of an hour. An hour."

She watched him go up the stairs with that easy, bounding grace that could never be imitated by anyone who was not young, and she thought how good it was that he had another year of college. But such a short time ago she had thought how good it was that he had four years to go, then three . . .

"What's the matter, Babe?" Tony asked. He still had his arm around her.

"Why? What should be the matter?"

"The way you were watching Jim."

"Oh. I don't know." She moved away from him and took a cigarette from the table next to Marcia. "I was thinking he's changed this summer. He never used to say things like that. 'You're not dull-witted, just optimistic.' That's rather clever."

"Yes." For some reason Tony did not sound pleased. "People get clever around advertising agencies." He turned to Marcia. "Have you heard from Lex?"

"No," she said. "I told him to call me if he needed moral support. It's not easy, at his age, to be waiting outside someone's office with his hat in his hand. But he hasn't called, so maybe everything's fine."

Zelda went up with Tony while he changed. When they passed

Ann's empty room, he asked where she was and Zelda told him she was out with Gerhardt.

"She's been seeing a lot of him, hasn't she?" he said. "What happened to the other one? Bill?"

"He still comes around sometimes. I don't know why she bothers with him at all, when she has Gerhardt. It's too bad in a way that she's going to college just now, when an attractive boy like this is interested in her."

"Ann's only a child. There will be lots of attractive boys."

"I don't know. It isn't the way it used to be. They don't play the field any more. How many can you cover, when you take them one at a time?"

Tony had his shirt off and was looking in the closet for his robe. "You don't have to worry about Ann," he said. "She'll be all right."

Whenever they talked about Ann, it always ended like this with Tony saying that she would be all right. He knew nothing about it, really. He had no idea what it was like to be a girl of seventeen at the beginning of a new love affair. At least if she had no other access to Ann's secret life, she had had the experience to imagine it.

"I don't think she's happy," Zelda said. "I don't think things are going well for her. You know, she isn't as stolid as you believe."

Tony came out of the closet without his trousers on, the robe over his arm. "What makes you think I believe she's stolid?"

"You're always so sure she's going to be all right."

He laughed. "That's a fine commentary, that is. 'The stolid shall inherit the earth.' The robe on his arm was a bright red and-yellow plaid. Twenty years ago he would never have worn a robe like that. "Did I ever tell you she wants to be a teacher?"

"Who?"

"Who? Who are we talking about? Ann, of course."

"No," she said, "you never told me that." Did everyone know more about her children than she did? "How do you know?"

"She said so once when we took a walk together. I wouldn't

put too much stock in it. She'll change her mind a dozen times."

He started for the bathroom and she followed him to the door. "Tony," she said, "Tony, is Jim all right? Do you think he's getting over that girl?"

"Must we have all this now—this—this Children's Hour—before cocktails?"

"What other time is there? There are always people around, and when we come up at night we're too tired."

"Yes," he said. "All right." He smiled and kissed her, though it did not seem an occasion for a kiss. "Jim's okay. I can't help thinking he was a little relieved about the whole thing, once the first shock wore off. How could he have expected to get married anyhow? He's about as ready for marriage as Tiny Tim."

"He always thinks he has to marry every girl he likes. I think it's kind of sweet."

"Yes, it is," Tony said. "Yes, it is kind of sweet."

"You know what I mean. I realize it was hard on you," she said. "Things don't seem as bad between you two, though, as they did before. A little strained, maybe, that's all. You haven't found out yet why he acted like that toward you have you?"

But he was in the shower, the water splatting against the plastic curtain, and he could not hear her.

She sat down on the chaise and lit a cigarette. When the summer was over and everything was normal again, she would really have to cut down on her smoking. It was getting so she was hardly ever without a cigarette in her hand.

Only when would everything be normal? She was not even sure what she meant by normal. People were always saying that these were not normal times, but she did not think they knew what they meant either. What were normal times? When settlers were being scalped by Indians or women were dying in droves of childbed fever and children of diphtheria or when workers spent sixty hours a week at their jobs?

She supposed what she really meant was not so much normal as settled. When things were settled, she would cut down on her smoking. Tony, I want to cut down on my smoking, so please

tell me whether you and Nancy Delletr have been carrying on an affair all these years. Please tell me whether you and she have a son. It could just as well be you as Lex, couldn't it? Please let me know, so I can cut down on my smoking.

He came out of the bathroom in his robe, and she moved over so he could lie down on the chaise. He reached for her hand and closed his eyes and they stayed that way, not speaking.

Suppose she were to ask him now, quietly, as they sat here. However he answered, she would know, in the first instant of surprise. She would see his eyes flash open and the color leave his face. For that instant he would be exposed and helpless, and once she had seen him that way, whatever happened, nothing could be the same again.

"We clinched the Roundtree liquor account today," he said, with his eyes still closed. "I believe you're looking at a successful man, Mrs. H."

She smiled. "You haven't forgotten that."

"How could I?"

They had been married in April and at the end of August he had left his job with Farnham, Cropsey and Wall and opened his own agency. There had been so much money around, enough, it seemed, to make everybody rich. When Tony got his third new account in less than six weeks, he came home with a bottle of champagne and announced, "I believe you're looking at a successful man, Mrs. H." That had been early in October, 1929.

"Do you remember the milk bottles?" she asked, hurr now.

"Milk bottles?"

"When we didn't have carfare to get to work. Don't you remember? That man at the dairy—what was his name?"

Tony's eyes were open now. "Greenberg," he said. "No, Greenstein. I remember. We'd try to act as if we just wanted to get rid of the bottles, as if getting the deposit back was incidental."

"I always thought he knew, though. He treated us so gently."

"Maybe he was just a gentle man. Well," Tony said. "I suppose I'd better get dressed and go down and make the cocktails." He sighed. "I'd rather stay here alone with you."

"I'm glad. That's a nice way to feel after all these years."

"Are you surprised?"

"No," she said. "No, I'm not surprised."

Married love was not like anything else, she thought. It was not merely loving each other but loving together—loving the two little rooms that were the first Halliday Advertising Agency, and Mr. Greenstein, and the dogwood tree on the terrace. No matter what violence might be done to your love for each other, these loves remained.

"Mr. Greenstein should see us now," Tony said.

She watched him putting on his blue and tan Hawaiian print shirt and thought that now he and Jim would not look so much alike any more, because Jim wore nothing but tee shirts around the house in the summer, despite her objection that they looked like underwear.

"I... and Jim's doing well at the office," she said. "It seems I was wrong."

"I don't know." Tony brushed his hair, arranging it carefully so the thicker portions covered the thinner. "I don't know whether you were wrong or not."

"What do you mean?"

"Let's not talk about it now. Let's go downstairs. I could use a martini."

Jim, she thought. Jim and Ann and Mr. Greenstein and the dogwood tree. But not Nancy Dellitt's son.

They were all in the living room after dinner when Lex arrived. Jim was helping Marcia with her jigsaw puzzle and Tony was trying to get WQXR on the radio and Zelda was emptying the ash trays that had got filled during cocktails and that Rena always forgot to clear away. It was, she thought afterwards, like a stage set, one of those drawing-room scenes when the curtain first went up and there was a little small talk to establish the characters and their relationships, but you still did not know what the play was all about—unless, of course, you had read the reviews, in which case you had no surprise coming. When Lex walked in, it was like the entrance of the star. The

entire focus of the scene centered on him, and the tone of the play was set.

Jim saw him first. "Hey," he said, "it's Lex."

Marcia turned around slowly. "Well, so it is. The return of the native." She looked up into his face and then smiled at Jim. "Make some highballs, yes? It's a long, dusty way from Washington."

Lex winked at Jim and patted the top of Marcia's head. "Hi, everybody."

"Have you eaten?" Zelda asked him. "Have you had dinner?" And at almost the same time Tony said, "Why didn't you let us know what time you were coming? Somebody could have met the train."

He looked around at them and grinned. The deep, becoming tan he had acquired over the summer had faded considerably in Washington and there was a smudge of soot on his collar. He seemed to Zelda less indestructible, less unreal than she had ever seen him.

"Thanks. I ate on the train and got a job at the station." He sat down and took the drink Jim brought him. "You're not welcoming the conquering hero, you know," he said. "I didn't get the job."

There was nothing to say, Zelda thought. If you were too sympathetic, you implied that something irretrievably tragic had happened. If you shrugged it off, you appeared not to care. Yet somebody had to say something. It was inevitable that it should be Jim who would ride over the nuances.

"Why the hell not?" he asked.

All of them, including Lex, laughed. Zelda could not have said what she was laughing at. She wondered whether the others knew.

"I haven't the least idea," Lex said. "They gave me a little double-talk and teased me pleasantly out." He laughed again. "I wasn't really sure, until I was in the train coming back, that they had actually said no."

"Well," Tony said. "All right. Let's drink to something. There must be something we can drink to."

Marcia lifted her glass and looked at Lex. "Happy days," she said.

They all took a few self-conscious gulps, and then Jim put down his glass and said he guessed he would go out. After a few minutes Lex said he thought he would wash up, and Marcia asked him if he was too tired to take her for a drive, because if he wasn't she would change. He said he would be glad to take her for a drive, that he would shower and dress and be ready in a jiffy. That was what he said, "in a jiffy." It was the first time Zelda had ever heard him use a phrase that dated him like that.

When they had all gone, Zelda emptied the ash trays again and took the glasses out to the kitchen. Tony had WQXR on when she got back, and they sat and listened to a Mozart symphony. Only "listened" was not an accurate word for it. Nobody ~~was~~ knew really listened to music. One couple they visited owned a fine collection of records, and always had a new one to play for their guests, but they themselves talked through it all.

"I'd like to lend him some money," Tony said, "but it's one of those things. I don't want to rub it in. Besides, I don't know what good it would do. What would happen when it was gone? I can't keep giving him handouts."

"He must have something. After all, he worked for cars."

Tony shook his head. "He hasn't much, not after his last wife of his. Maybe I can make a job for him. I don't know. There ought to be something."

She wondered whether Lex would take a job like that. She remembered what he had said to her once about always wanting what Tony had. Now that he had ended with none of it, with nothing, would he accept help from Tony? Most men would not, but you could never tell about Lex.

The news came on the radio and they stopped talking to hear it. Some MIGs had been shot down over Korea. The Republicans said the Democrats were corrupt and the Democrats said the

Republicans were indifferent to the common man. The Giants were creeping up on the Dodgers for the National League pennant.

Another voice, less crisp, more dulcet, suggested that the drink for after the concert was Culverton whisky, on the rocks or with soda or gingerale. "However you prefer it, you will agree with the Earl of Culverton, the man with the sling—there is no finer whisky."

Tony got up and snapped off the switch. "I don't like that announcer," he said. "He sounds as if he's never taken a drink in his life."

Zelda never waited up for Ann, because she had hated it so when her mother waited up for her. It had almost spoiled her evenings, thinking of her mother sitting there alone in the parlor in her wrapper, watching the clock and listening for her. Whatever reading her mother had done, she had done then, but Zelda did not think it could have been much. The only book Zelda ever remembered seeing in her hand was "So Big," by Edna Ferber. She was always sitting with her finger in it when Zelda came in, as if she intended going on with it in a minute, as soon as she had found out why Zelda was so late; but after the whispered due she invariably went straight upstairs, tiptoeing so as not to wake the others.

Zelda made a point of not being in evidence when Ann came home, but if she was in bed before that, although she sometimes dozed, she never really slept until she heard her key. Since Gerhardt had been coming around, she had to restrain herself to keep from running out and asking Ann what had happened, where they had gone, what he had said to her. Sometimes, if she was careful not to ask, Ann would drop a word or two the next day. Zelda had to be grateful for these crumbs.

She had just gone to bed the night Lex came back from Washington, when Ann got in, a little after twelve thirty. Zelda was disappointed. Twelve thirty was early for a Friday night, if you

were having an exciting time. She lay listening to the sounds in the next room the shoes dropping and the hangers sliding on the closet pole. Ann was trying to be quiet, she was sure, but she still had the heavy-handedness of adolescence. Sometimes she was lovely but sometimes it was hard to understand what a boy like Gerhardt saw in her. There was so much Zelda could have told her about how to hold him, but you could not tell Ann much.

Zelda heard the bed in the next room creak and the lamp snap off. Tony breathed quietly and evenly beside her. Outside a thousand male crickets rubbed their wings together, setting up a clamor that kept city visitors awake, but she did not hear it any more than she had once heard traffic in the New York streets. Another sound came through to her. She lay without moving for a minute and then she got up. I can't stay here and do nothing, she thought, while my child cries in the night. Even if she doesn't want me, I can't do it.

She raised her hand to knock on Ann's door but the gesture seemed artificial and foolish and she just went in and sat down on the bed. Ann was lying on her stomach with her face in the pillow. She stopped for a second and Zelda saw her shoulders tense, but when she realized that Zelda was not going to say anything or touch her, she went on crying.

Zelda waited. It seemed a long time before the sobs began a decrescendo.

"Mother?" Ann said, with her face still in the pillow.

"Yes, dear?"

"You're going to be disappointed."

I don't want to hear it, Zelda thought. I don't want to know.

"You couldn't disappoint me," she said. It sounded like a line from a popular song. She had never felt more motherly, less herself. But she went on with it. "Whatever happens, you're my girl." *

Ann rolled over. Even in the dark, Zelda could see that her eyes were swollen. She wondered why it was that a child's eyes never got swollen, with all the crying they did. Only a little

while ago she had told Gerhardt that Ann was a child, and this evening Tony had said so.

"Gerry asked me to be engaged to him," she said. "He said he'd wait until I was through with college, if you insisted. He said—" She stopped and shook her head, as if she were getting off the track. "I told him—you'll be disappointed—I told him I didn't want to see him any more."

Zelda relaxed against the footboard. "Is that why you think I'll be disappointed? Because you don't want to see him any more?"

"I know you think he's wonderful, and it isn't that I don't like him, but I can't—I'm too young to be engaged."

We never felt we were too young for anything, Zelda thought. "I didn't want you to be engaged to him," she said. "Did you think I did? I just wanted you to have a good time."

"I'm too young for him." Ann sat up and hugged her knees with her arms. Zelda was almost afraid to move. She was afraid that if she did or said anything wrong, Ann would stop and never go on again. The trouble was she was not sure what would be wrong. "I may never get married at all," Ann said.

"Well, that's all right. No one will make you." She wanted a cigarette, but she did without it. Ann was always saying she smoked too much. "I understand you'd like to be a teacher."

"No!" Ann's knees jerked down and she sat up stiffly. "That was just a crazy idea I had," she said more quietly. "I'm all over that."

There was something here, but Zelda was not going to ask what it was; she was not going to spoil anything, if she could help it. "You'll find something else you want to do," she said. "There's plenty of time."

Ann pulled up her knees again. "I thought you'd think I was crazy." Zelda did not know whether she meant because of Gerhardt or because she might never want to get married. "Bill didn't call tonight, did he?" she asked suddenly.

"No."

"I guess he won't any more." After a moment she sighed. "I

guess I don't really want him to." She slid slowly down in the bed. "Gosh, I feel better," She lay still, as if considering this, and then added, "It's too bad boys can't cry."

Zelda leaned down and kissed her. "Everything's going to be all right."

Ann did not answer. She yawned and turned on her side. As Zelda got to the door, she murmured sleepily, "Don't worry. I'll probably get married some day."

Zelda could not go back to bed. She went downstairs and got herself a glass of milk from the refrigerator, something she had not done in thirty years, and sat in the breakfast room sipping it slowly. It was cold and clean-tasting and she had the feeling that she did not have often about anything, that it was exactly right. She thought of Ann and for a moment she wished Ann were here drinking milk with her, but she knew Ann was asleep and then she knew that was exactly right too.

She was still sitting there, slowly sipping the last few drops, when she heard Marcia's car. They came in quietly, and she hoped they would go straight upstairs, but in a moment Marcia tiptoed to the door and looked in.

"I thought it might be you when I saw the light," she said. "I told Lex to go up." She came in and sat down. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes had that wonderful alive look that made her seem beautiful. "What the hell are you drinking?"

Zelda laughed. She had not wanted to see anyone. She had wanted to sit here alone with her glass of milk. But you could not stay in one moment; you always had to go on to something else. She was glad, now, that Marcia was here.

"You look fine," she said. "What are you doing, thriving on Lex's misfortune?"

"Maybe you could put it that way." Marcia lit a cigarette and gave one to Zelda. "Lex and I are going to remarry."

It seemed such an odd word for Marcia to use. Remarry. Zelda did not know why, but it seemed prim and at the same time a little vulgar. But what difference did it make what word she used?

"If you've made up your mind," Zelda said, "I suppose there's nothing I can say to stop you. I'd like to understand it, though." Without warning she was angry: "How can he marry you now when he hasn't anything, not even a job?"

Marcia smiled. "What else can he do? It's nice clean work. He's tried it before, so he knows the dangers. And the pay is good."

"That isn't funny." There was nothing Zelda could do about her anger now. She got up and began walking back and forth. "It was bad enough before, but at least he wasn't going to have to live off you completely. Now he has nothing to offer you at all."

"He has everything I want." Marcia paused. "No, let's put it this way. He has everything I'm ever likely to get."

Zelda stood still. "Do you know why the State Department won't have him?"

"Oh, sit down, Zel. Yes, of course I know. I told you I talked to Paula Thayer."

"And you don't care?"

"Because there's a rumor around that he has a bastard son?"

Zelda sat down slowly. "Suppose it isn't a rumor?"

"Why," Marcia said, "should I suppose that? The way it stands, I don't have to believe it. There are plenty of things about him I do have to believe. This is one I can skip. The State Department can't give him the benefit of the doubt, but I can."

"But if you knew it were true—if he told you himself—would you marry him then?"

"Yes. I wouldn't let it spoil my life," she said. "I'll never be fool enough to ask him, though. This way, I don't know whether Nancy Dellert has an illegitimate son at all, or whether somebody is just spreading nasty rumors. And if she has, I don't know who the father is and I don't have to care."

Zelda was sure she had heard these words before, and then she knew that they were substantially the words she had told herself, without finding them convincing.

"It seems all wrong," she said. "You're making too many compromises."

"The sanitariums are full of people who won't make compromises. I love Lex and I understand him," she said. "I always have. But it wasn't enough. It's never enough. I wanted him different, but now I'm willing to accept him as he is."

"You mean just sit back and let him take, let him sponge, and smile?"

"That's not what I mean. Look, Zel, if we're going to keep this up, do you mind if I make myself a drink?"

"We don't have to keep it up if you'd rather not."

Marcia laughed. "I love you when you're all stiff and priggish. It reminds me of the way you were when you first came to New York. Even then, it was a pose." She went in to the bar and returned with a highball. The ice tray stuck as she took it out, and she swore at it until she got it loose. She put three cubes in her drink and came back to the table, ignoring the water that had splashed all over the floor. "There," she said. "That's better."

The clock in the hall struck two. It was the same clock that had stood on the first landing in the Framington house, and whenever it chimed after one of the girls had come in late at night, their mother would pause dramatically in the middle of her lecture until it had stopped. In the Studio, they had sometimes talked like this all night.

"You were telling me about accepting Lex," Zelda said.

"Yes. Well. This time we'll be all right. Look, Zel. I'm a fat, middle-aged woman. Men like me all right, but who would want to marry me now any more except a drunk like Willie Taynor? Or Lex." She did not sound pitiable. She sounded fine. She took a gulp of her drink and lit another cigarette. "Lex is accepting me, too. He knows everything about me and it doesn't matter. I think that's the only way you can really help anybody, when you don't resent anything they are. Because if you do, they know it, and they resent you right back."

Zelda did not speak. She was thinking of Ann, and of some of the things Ann had said. "I know you think he's wonderful,

but I can't—I'm too young," and "I thought you'd think I was crazy" and "you'll be disappointed."

"Yes," Zelda said. "I see what you mean."

"Do you? Well," Marcia looked at her and then down at her glass. "You know I've grown awfully fond of Jim this summer," she said. "He's a good boy."

What did Jim have to do with this? Zelda thought. "It's obviously mutual," she said.

"He's a good boy," Marcia repeated. "He'll make out all right with Tony."

"I've never felt that was the place for him."

"I know you haven't. He knows it too. What's the alternative, Zel? He's no Raymond Loewy. He's a boy who's good with his hands, but he can't make a living with them—not the kind of living he'd want, not in the world he has grown up in. He'd never be happy." She smiled at Zelda. "He'll have to compromise too."

"Have you told him this?"

"No," Marcia said. "It isn't whether he felt . . . him. Besides, it isn't from me he needs to be told."

Marcia and Lex rushed their plans so that Ann would not have to miss their wedding. They were married on the terrace, with chrysanthemums blooming in the background, a few hours before she had to leave for freshman week at Radcliffe.

Zelda thought of the first time, in the chapel at City Hall, with a line of other couples waiting outside the door. She and Tony had been there then too. And now they were all here, and Ann and Jim were here with them, and for a minute she wondered how they had all got here, how it had all happened. If it had not been for Morgan Riley— But there was no use starting on that. She might as well say, if it had not been for Prohibition or the girl who acted like a poached egg or the Depression—or Nancy Dellett. . . .

Afterwards, they all watched Marcia and Lex drive off in

Marcia's car. They would not say where they were going, only that they would write post-cards.

"They look funny," Ann said. "Almost as if they were young."

Two hours later, Ann was gone too, on the train to Boston.

"It doesn't seem fair," Zelda said in the car going home from Grand Central. "Just when children begin to be the most fun, they leave." It was not what she meant to say at all. She did not mean fun. "It's all over too quickly, before you have a chance—" But she did not go on. There was no use trying to put it into words.

"I know," Tony said. Even he couldn't know exactly.

Jim said nothing. She had thought he would kid her. It was the kind of thing he usually kidded her about. But he sat silently in the back seat. Zelda wondered whether he felt all right, because he had not even wanted to drive, and he always wanted to drive. This was the first time he had been home since the night Lex came back from Washington. He had gone to see somebody in New Jersey college, and maybe he had caught something.

"Do you feel well, Jim?" she asked.

"Sure," he said. "I'm fine."

"We'll be seeing you off for college next," Tony said. "It's going to be a pretty empty house."

Tony always sounded unnatural lately when he talked to Jim, and she always had the feeling that Jim might not answer at all. He said nothing now for a long time.

"I guess I might as well tell you," he said finally. "I guess this is as good a time as any. I'm not going back to college."

Tony cleared his throat. "Why not, Jim?"

"I've been down to see Wick these past few days. I wanted to talk to him." Zelda had to think a minute to remember who Wick was. "He's at Cape May, you know, in the Coast Guard, and I wanted to talk things over with him."

What things? Zelda thought. What things did he have to go all the way down to Cape May to talk over with a boy she could

hardly remember? But his voice was going on from the back seat.

"It's okay there," he said. "They're a bunch of good guys."

"All right. They're a bunch of good guys." Tony sounded better, impatient and like himself. "What are you trying to say?"

"I enlisted," Jim said. "I leave next week."

It was too much. You could not shift that quickly. Two hours ago she had been a witness at her sister's wedding and then she had been the mother sending her youngest child off to college and now she was expected to be the mother sending her son off to war. They were driving along the Hutchinson River Parkway, and nothing had changed, not the toll gates nor the speeding cars nor the shrubbery, just beginning to turn, yet nothing was at it had been.

"Oh, Jim, why?" she said. "Why didn't you wait?"

"There wasn't any use," he said. "I guess I can't explain it. I guess you wouldn't understand. But down there at Cape May I felt right. I don't know. As if I belonged there."

She wanted to ask him whether he felt wrong at home, but she did not ask him. She did not want to hear the answer.

"All right," Tony said. "That's the way you wanted it, all right. There's nothing more to say."

"Don't be mad."

"I'm not mad," Tony said. "Neither of us is mad." He took one hand off the wheel and put it over Zelda's on the seat beside him. "A son in the service. That's nothing to be mad about."

"Hearts and flowers," Jim said, and laughed. "Hearts and flowers."

They drove along in silence. If only she had had a chance to talk to him, Zelda thought. But then she knew that it probably would have been too late, twenty-five years too late. Even this went back to Morgan Riley and the Studio and stronger orange flower water. It was a new time now, Jim's time, and with what they had given him he would have to find his own way of living it.

"Will you let me off at Libby's?" he said. "She's having a party. I'll get a lift home."

When he had gone, Tony said, "Don't worry, Babe. Everything will be all right."

It was what she had said to Ann, and it was not so. Everything was never all right. But some things always were, and you made do with those.

"In the end it gets back to you and me, doesn't it?" he said. "After all the others have finished and gone, it gets back to you and me."

She did not know who he meant by all the others, who was included, but she knew this was true. In the end it got back to the two of them.